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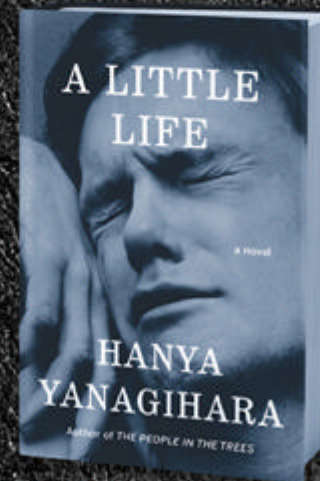
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CONTRIBUTORS

NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE ("THE KINGS OF THE DESERT," P. 42) is a staff writer and the author of "To Live or to Perish Forever."

GEORGE PACKER (COMMENT, P. 19) won a National Book Award for "The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America," which is available in paperback.

BEN McGRATH ("DREAM TEAMS," P. 26), a staff writer, frequently covers sports for the magazine.

PAUL RUDNICK (SHOUTS & MURMURS, P. 33) has published several books, the most recent of which is "Gorgeous," a young-adult novel.

RIVKA GALCHEN ("WEATHER UNDERGROUND," P. 34) is the author of the short-story collection "American Innovations" and the book-length essay "Little Labors," which is due out later this year.

ARIEL LEVY ("THE PRICE OF A LIFE," P. 54), who won a 2014 National Magazine Award for essays and criticism, is the guest editor of "The Best American Essays 2015," which will be published in the fall.

NICK LAIRD (POEM, P. 58) is a poet and a novelist from Northern Ireland. "Go Giants" is his most recent poetry collection.

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE (FICTION, P. 64) has published three novels, including "Americanah," which is being made into a film.

KATHRYN SCHULZ (A CRITIC AT LARGE, P. 75), a staff writer, is the author of "Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error."

HARRY BLISS (COVER), a longtime *New Yorker* cartoonist, has illustrated many children's books, among them "Grandma in Blue with Red Hat," which comes out later this month.

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ALSO:

DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT: Opinions and reflections by Adam Gopnik, Kathryn Schulz, and others.

ARCHIVE: Classic *New Yorker* stories, rendered in easy-to-read text. New this week: John McPhee's Profile of Bill Bradley, from 1965.

HUMOR: A Daily Cartoon on the news, by Emily Flake. Plus, Andy Borowitz and the Shouts & Murmurs blog.

PODCASTS: On Out Loud, Emily Nussbaum, David Haglund, and Amelia Lester talk about the final season of "Mad Men" and the show's legacy. Plus, on the Political Scene, Eric Foner and Jelani Cobb join Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion about Reconstruction and the civil-rights struggles of today.

VIDEO: The latest episode of "The Cartoon Lounge," with Robert Mankoff.

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THE MAIL

NUCLEAR VULNERABILITY

Eric Schlosser usefully describes the vulnerabilities of U.S. nuclear-weapon sites by highlighting the break-in of the Y-12 National Security Complex by peace activists ("Break-In at Y-12," March 9th). But his discussion of the possibility that terrorists might steal a weapon or build one without being caught or killing themselves does not reflect how difficult that would be. I am a visiting scholar at Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation, and I served as staff director of the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee on Energy and Nuclear Proliferation. Schlosser is correct in pointing out that the amount of nuclear-weapons-grade material needed to create an explosion of significant yield is relatively small, but a terrorist seeking to build even a crude weapon would face a number of obstacles, including early discovery. The probability of nuclear terrorism is "low," Schlosser concludes, though he also quotes members of a bipartisan commission on national security who wrote in 2003, "There is little doubt that Al Qaeda intends to and can detonate a weapon of mass destruction on U.S. soil." Despite the interest expressed by Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda never posed a clear nuclear threat. The cause of nuclear disarmament is important, but, to the extent that the article feeds fear of nuclear terrorism, it risks generating more support for war, as in Iraq, and for mass surveillance, which has a chilling effect on dissent. This is a more immediate threat than that of a nuclear terrorist attack.

*Leonard Weiss
Palo Alto, Calif.*

Schlosser's article shows how Plowshares, by exposing unsustainable on-site security practices, is facilitating important steps toward nuclear disarmament. I am an attorney who has served as a defense lawyer in half a dozen Plowshares cases since 1998. Schlosser cites unnamed sources as saying that nuclear abolition is "a dangerous and impossi-

ble fantasy," because it would make the U.S. "appear weak." This rationale is based on the false premise that security can be obtained through deterrence, when we now know that even a so-called limited bombing results in disaster. Nuclear weapons make us all fundamentally vulnerable. As Sister Megan Rice testified, "Every moment, as we sit here, is an imminent threat to the life of the planet." The U.S. justifies its continuing production, threat, or use of nuclear weapons by arguing for the necessity of these programs, but, as Schlosser writes, Plowshares activists were forbidden to apply the "necessity defense" in their case. The resisters have revealed that contract awards and disputes regarding Y-12 materials for thermonuclear warheads involve duplicitous corporations. Thankfully, this can help bring an end to the dangerous foolishness of nuclear weapons.

*Anabel Dwyer
Mackinaw City, Mich.*

WHO'S THAT?

I read John McPhee's piece on alienating allusions with interest ("Frame of Reference," March 9th). What collective heritage might we baby boomers hope to pass on? Boswell and Johnson would be on my list, and Auschwitz, and Abraham Lincoln and Kent State, and more. But the challenge is to draw a reasonable line. It's asking for disappointment to expect kids to know Thomas Hoving or a B-36. Popular culture will have to make choices and filter out the small stuff. Trading Jackie Gleason for Homer Simpson is not a bad deal. I suppose one day my kids will be shocked when their grandkids don't get the meaning of "D'oh!"

*Roy J. Epstein
Belmont, Mass.*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



APRIL 2015 WEDNESDAY 8TH THURSDAY 9TH FRIDAY 10TH SATURDAY 11TH SUNDAY 12TH MONDAY 13TH TUESDAY 14TH

RHIANNON GIDDENS, one of the founders of the beautifully intimate group the Carolina Chocolate Drops and a Greensboro, North Carolina, native, has a Southern twang to her very clear voice. She sometimes plays the banjo, and her voice can move along like a banjo, too, especially when she sings slowly, and with pluck. Her new album, "Tomorrow Is My Turn," is a solo effort, made with the estimable producer T Bone Burnett. Giddens's version of "Shake Sugaree," by Elizabeth Cotten, sounds like a precursor of the blues that points toward the folk music of the nineteen-sixties. But Giddens is of her time. Her syntax and harmonic strength are part of a tradition of American music: storytellers who joyfully preach the truth from a woman's point of view—sometimes with trouble in mind, too. She appears at Town Hall on April 9.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMANTHA CASOLARI

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

An American in Paris

Craig Lucas wrote the book for this musical adaptation of the 1951 film, with music and lyrics by George and Ira Gershwin, directed and choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon. In previews. Opens April 12. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

Finding Neverland

Diane Paulus directs a new musical based on the 2004 movie, about the life of J. M. Barrie, with a book by James Graham and music and lyrics by Gary Barlow and Eliot Kennedy. Starring Matthew Morrison ("Glee") and Kelsey Grammer. In previews. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929.)

Ghosts

Almeida Theatre's production of the Henrik Ibsen play, adapted and directed by Richard Eyre. Lesley Manville stars, as a woman anguished by the moral deceptions of her late husband. In previews. Opens April 12. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Gigi

Eric Schaeffer directs the musical by Alan Jay Lerner (book and lyrics) and Frederick Loewe (music), adapted by Heidi Thomas, about a young Parisian woman who falls in love with a wealthy playboy. With Vanessa Hudgens, Corey Cott, and Victoria Clark. Opens April 8. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)

It Shoulda Been You

Tyne Daly, Harriet Harris, Lisa Howard, and Sierra Boggess star in this new musical comedy, directed by David Hyde Pierce, in which two very different families clash at the wedding of their children. With a book and lyrics by Brian Hargrove and music by Barbara Anselmi. In previews. Opens April 14. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929.)

The 39 Steps

Patrick Barlow's popular Hitchcock spoof, in which four actors play more than a hundred roles, returns. Directed by Maria Aitken. In previews. Opens April 13. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 877-250-2929.)

'Tis Pity She's a Whore

Red Bull Theatre stages John Ford's Jacobean tragedy, about an incestuous affair in Renaissance Parma. Jesse Berger directs. Previews begin April 14. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

Wolf Hall: Parts One & Two

The Royal Shakespeare Company's productions of Hilary Mantel's books "Wolf Hall" and "Bring Up the Bodies" come to Broadway. In previews. Opens April 9. (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

Five Times in One Night

Chiara Atik has written a quintet of playlets that wittily depict a woman and a man discovering truths about themselves and each other through the prism of their sexual relations. Joy, danger, excitement, uncertainty, and disappointment all factor in, as we observe one scene with the last two people on Earth, another with the first two, a pair of sketches in contemporary settings, and one more from the twelfth century. Darcy Fowler and Dylan Dawson play all five couples, and they're both excellent, exhibiting a winning range of comic and dramatic styles. Directed by R. J. Tolan, the actors achieve lovely rhythms that vary smartly with the tone and character of each scene. While Atik's writing occasionally loses some sharpness, it's most often funny and revealing. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 866-811-4111.)

Living Here: A Map of Songs

After years of staying and performing in people's homes across New Zealand and the United States, Gideon Irving is observing a residency of sorts, playing here in his home town, in a different house or apartment each night. As showtime approaches, Irving mingles amiably with the guests, then suddenly unleashes a huge singing voice, a flexible amalgam of cantorial, operatic, and folk-rock styles, as he makes his way to a small performing space. With the help of some charming and inventive illustrations, he tells his story—of being a perpetual guest in the world, and of the joys and longings of that existence. Showing an impressive range of musicality on banjo, bouzouki, kazoo, harmonium, ankle bells (he's barefoot), Jew's harp, and electronics, he sings original compositions that are unique and unclassifiable, like the guy himself. (For tickets and locations, visit thefoundrytheatre.org or call 866-811-4111.)

Lonesome Traveler

This acoustic jukebox musical about American folk history, complete with audience sing-alongs, celebrates twentieth-century heroes such as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, and Odetta. To its credit, the show, written and directed by James O'Neil, with musical direction by Dan and Trevor Wheatman, is musically glorious, and it doesn't shy away from the movement's radicalism; it also features cringe-inducing narrative awkwardness. "Hoo-ee! These arrangements are gettin' more and more lush every day," Guthrie (Matty Charles) says. Later, in a historical montage, a list of contemporary folk-band names whirls by on a screen, then segues to a photograph of Condoleezza Rice. Such flaws are benign enough—you're there mostly

to sing "This Land Is Your Land" with a roomful of fellow-travellers. But other bumbling is less forgivable. Historical influences, in the form of black musicians of the rural South, regularly appear behind dark scrimms, singing while they mop or play the washboard, as peppy white squares take center stage. This is meant to show respect, but, hoo-ee, does it backfire. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

My Name Is Rachel Corrie

Jonathan Kane directs a return engagement of the controversial solo play, based on the writings of a young American activist who died in Gaza, in 2003. (Lynn Redgrave Theatre, 45 Bleeker St. 866-811-4111. Through April 12.)

Soldier X

In this Ma-Yi Theatre Company production of Rehana Lew Mirza's play, two Marines (Carolyn Michelle Smith and Jared McNeill) return from the war in Afghanistan badly damaged, and a Navy social worker with issues of her own (Kaliswa Brewster) thinks that she can help them. Most of her efforts, though, only cause more pain for everyone, including a young Muslim woman (Turna Mete) whose brother died overseas alongside one of the returning vets. Mirza's anti-war drama is overambitious—she's writing not just about the darkness of men and the horrors of war but also about racial prejudice and the objectification of women—and her actors, under the direction of Lucie Tiberghien, struggle under the weight of so much unwieldy material. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

The Undeniable Sound of Right Now

A "Cherry Orchard" for the indie-rock crowd, Laura Eason's new play, set in 1992, finds a grizzled rocker named Hank (Jeb Brown) and his nubile daughter, Lena (Margo Seibert), clinging to their grimy, imperilled Chicago club. (John McDermott's set is a dingy knockout.) Lena is tempted by rave music—and by Nash (Daniel Abeles), the swash-buckling d.j. who plays it. Her dad isn't swayed, even as he faces rent increases and a suspicion that the culture is changing, while his tastes aren't. As in her earlier play "Sex with Strangers," Eason favors oppositions—women and men, young and old, dated and new. Here, under Kirsten Kelly's tentative direction, the parallels and polarities feel more schematic, the play more prescribed. But Eason, who used to be in a band herself, captures what music means to her characters, especially Hank, whom Brown inhabits feelingly. It is, Hank says, "some kind of magic." (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 866-811-4111.)



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Jordi Savall, the reigning master of the viola da gamba, is featured in Carnegie Hall's festival "Before Bach."



CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Nicholas Hytner's production of Verdi's **"Don Carlo,"** arguably the grandest of his grand operas, portrays King Philip II's court at the time of the Spanish Inquisition as a baleful fortress of hard angles and stifling religiosity. The conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin conjures the hollow pomp of royal obligations and the simmering of repressed passion, but entrusts the drama's human dimension to the singers. Fortunately, Ferruccio Furlanetto, a chillingly authoritarian Philip, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky, a glamorously voiced Rodrigo, are standard-bearers in their roles. Ekaterina Gubanova, though not quite at this level, teases out the dangerous sensuality of Princess Eboli's music, and Yonghoon Lee (Don Carlo) and Barbara Frittoli (Elisabeth) rise fitfully to the constant crests of their solos and love duets. (April 11 at noon.) • **Also playing:** Paul Nadler takes over from James Levine to conduct the final two performances of Verdi's early-period melodrama **"Ernani,"** featuring the thrilling Francesco Meli in the title role and Angela Meade as Elvira, Dimitry Belosselskiy as de Silva, and Plácido Domingo, whose typically lustrous timbre fails to register in the baritone role of Don Carlo. (April 8 at 7:30 and April 11 at 8:30. Luc Robert replaces Meli on April 8.) • **"Aida,"** in the stunningly monumental Sonja Frisell production, returns to the schedule this week, with Oksana Dyka in the title role and Marco Berti as Radamès. Also with the estimable Violeta Urmana, Mark Delavan, and Stefan Kocán; Plácido Domingo conducts. (April 9 at 8 and April 13 at 7:30.) • The final performance of **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** featuring a fine cast that includes Albina Shagimuratova, Joseph Calleja, and Luca Salsi in the leading roles; Maurizio Benini. (April 10 at 7:30.) • The two one-act operas that define Italian verismo—Mascagni's **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and Leoncavallo's **"Pagliacci"**—receive a new production by David McVicar, who has become perhaps the most reliable (if one of the most conservative) directors of the Peter Gelb era. (His recent stagings include a delightful "Giulio Cesare" and gravely effective productions of "Anna Bolena" and

THE QUIET MAN

The soft tones of the viol speak volumes at Carnegie Hall.

LAST NOVEMBER, the *New York Times Magazine* published a feature entitled "A Brief History of Failure," which listed, among various devices and technologies that have fallen by the wayside, the viola da gamba, or viol, a mainstay of Renaissance and Baroque music. The article presented the viol as a sweet-natured weakling among instruments, one that had been supplanted, in the eighteenth century, by members of the violin family, which project more easily into a concert hall. This attempted epitaph elicited a social-media outcry from early-music aficionados, who pointed out that the viol has been enjoying a renaissance in recent decades. Indeed, the viol has produced a certifiable superstar: the august Catalan musician Jordi Savall, who plays a solo recital at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall on April 13, as part of a month-long early-music festival entitled "Before Bach" (through May 1). On April 20, the British viol consort Fretwork will come to Carnegie with a program of works by Purcell, Locke, Gibbons, and others.

Elizabeth Winfield, who leads the New York viol group Sonnambula, recently wrote a spirited defense of her instrument. Winfield concedes that modern string instruments easily overcome old ones with their steel-string power, but she argues that viols remain alluring precisely because they hark back to a preindustrial age: "Their delicate bodies are made with thin slabs of wood, strung with gut strings and frets, and are played *da gamba*, or on the leg." In addition, viols have thrived on digital recordings, which allow their quiet, quavering voices to rise from hermetic silence.

Above all, viols have failed to fail because the music written for them commands attention. At Carnegie, Savall will focus on the French Baroque composers Sainte-Colombe and Marin Marais, who figured in the 1991 film "Tous les Matins du Monde," for which Savall supplied the soundtrack. His recital is sold out, but you can hear much of the same repertory on recordings from Savall's boutique label, Alia Vox. The disk that I treasure most is Savall's account of John Dowland's 1604 "Lachrimae," music of the most sensuous and enveloping melancholy. "Hamlet" emanates from the same time and place, and speaks the same dark, lush language.

—Alex Ross

"Maria Stuarda.") Marcelo Álvarez takes both the male leads, Turiddu and Canio, with Eva-Maria Westbroek (the incandescent star of last fall's "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District") as Santuzza and Patricia Racette as Nedda; Fabio Luisi, the Met's principal conductor, is on the podium. (April 14 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

R. B. Schlather's "Orlando"

The daring young director has responded to the crisis in contemporary opera by removing the distinction between production and performance, turning the rehearsal process into an ongoing art installation that members of the public can observe at will. Having begun his exploration of Handel's trilogy of operas based on texts by Ariosto with an acclaimed showing of "Alcina," Schlather returns to the Whitebox Art Center with this piece, one of the most compactly powerful of the composer's stage works, directing a cast that includes the up-and-coming Met soprano Kiera Duffy and the veteran countertenor Drew Minter. (329 Broome St. Open rehearsals begin April 8; the finished performances are on April 26-27. whiteboxnyc.org.)

LoftOpera: "Lucrezia Borgia"

While the tussle over the remains of New York City Opera continues in court, dynamic little companies like this one are remaking opera in the five boroughs. With imaginative bare-bones productions of Mozart and Rossini under its belt, the troupe now takes on Donizetti's bel-canto masterpiece, based on Victor Hugo's play about the dark doings of the most infamously violent family of the Italian Renaissance. Sean Kelly conducts. (LightSpace Studios, 1115 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn. loftopera.com. April 10-11 at 8; these are the final performances.)

Les Violons du Roy: "Dido and Aeneas"

The music of Henry Purcell is a big part of Carnegie Hall's month-long festival "Before Bach." Richard Egarr conducts the renowned Quebecois period-instrument orchestra (and its choral component, La Chapelle de Québec) in a complete concert performance of his supreme masterwork (with Dorothea Röschmann and Henk Neven in the title roles), preluded by selections from the semi-operas "The Fairy Queen" and "King Arthur." (212-247-7800. April 12 at 2.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

For centuries, J. S. Bach's Concerto for Violin and Oboe has stood as the only major example of a work for this intriguing combination of lyrical instruments. Now Thierry Escaich, a leading French composer, is adding to this rare repertory, with a piece for the violinist Lisa Batiashvili (a longtime Philharmonic favorite) and her husband, the distinguished oboist François Leleux. Alan Gilbert conducts the American première in a program that concludes with Shostakovich's searing Tenth Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. April 8-9 at 7:30 and April 10-11 at 8.)

New York Choral Society and the Mannes Orchestra

David Hayes ably leads his ensembles in a concert that explores two indelible American responses to tragedy: John Adams's Pulitzer Prize-winning "On the Transmigration of Souls," written after 9/11, and Hindemith's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," a noble setting of Whitman's poem of the same name that was written after the Second World War, during the composer's American sojourn at Yale. Abigail Fischer and Lee Poulis are the vocal soloists. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 8 at 8.)

American Composers Orchestra

Wynton Marsalis brings the A.C.O. to his home turf, Jazz at Lincoln Center, for a performance of his recently completed "Blues Symphony," one of his few works for symphony orchestra alone. Music by two other jazz masters, Uri Caine ("Double Trouble," with the composer on piano) and Courtney Brian, are also featured; George Manahan conducts. (Broadway at 60th St. jazz.org. April 9 at 8.)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

A rare U.S. appearance by the exciting Turkish composer-pianist Fazil Say highlights the virtuoso conductorless chamber orchestra's latest concert at Carnegie Hall. Performances of Say's brand-new Chamber Symphony and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major are bookended by Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll" and Haydn's mercurial and magnificent Symphony No. 80 in D Minor. (212-247-7800. April 11 at 7.)

RECITALS

Sonnambula

Early music flourishes beyond Carnegie Hall this week. This fine home-town group of strings, organ, and tenor performs a selection of music from fifteenth-century Florence to mark the Museum of Biblical Art's exhibition "Sculpture in the Age of Donatello." (Broadway at 61st St. gemsny.org. April 9 at 7:30.)

Miller Theatre: "Helmut Lachenmann + Bach"

Lachenmann, the master of an extraordinarily challenging and astringent style, shares pride of place on this program with J. S. Bach, another composer who expanded the possibilities of Western instruments. The young virtuosos of Ensemble Signal bring their abilities to four Lachenmann works (including "Toccatina"), as well as to excerpts from Bach's music for solo strings (such as the Chaconne from the Partita No. 2 for Violin Solo). (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. millertheatre.com. April 9 at 8.)

Sarah Connolly

The famed British mezzo-soprano comes to Alice Tully Hall to offer an exceptionally rich program; it features not only songs by Schubert and Mahler (the "Rückert-Lieder") but also selections from Copland's towering cycle "Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson" and Elgar's complete "Sea Pictures." (212-721-6500. April 12 at 5.)

Juilliard Percussion Ensemble:

"The Alchemy of Sound:

George Crumb at 85"

A legend of American music, who expanded the meaning of sound for an entire generation, reaches a milestone, and Daniel Druckman's group, joined by two excellent student singers, responds in kind, performing an all-Crumb program that features two substantial works from his "American Songbook" cycle, "The River of Life" and "The Winds of Destiny." (Alice Tully Hall. April 13 at 8. For information about free tickets, see events.juilliard.edu.)

Mutter-Bronfman-Harrell Trio

Anne-Sophie Mutter, a potent presence at Carnegie Hall this season, teams up with a pair of storied colleagues—the cellist Lynn Harrell and the pianist Yefim Bronfman—to perform two bulwarks of the piano-trio repertoire, Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio and Tchaikovsky's Trio in A Minor. (212-247-7800. April 14 at 8.)

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ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Fatal Attraction: Piotr Ukiński Photographs." Through Aug. 16.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"One-Way Ticket: Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series and Other Visions of the Great Movement North." Through Sept. 7.

MOMA PSI

"Simon Denny: The Innovator's Dilemma." Through Sept. 7.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"On Kawara—Silence." Through May 3.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Basquiat: the Unknown Notebooks." Through Aug. 23.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Jewish Museum

"Laurie Simmons: How We See"

The American photographer, whose work has always involved artifice and role-play, exhibits six immense color head shots of strikingly attractive but oddly alien-looking models. Inspired by the social-media phenomenon of young women who use makeup to transform themselves into living dolls, Simmons hired a makeup artist to paint wide-open eyes on the closed eyelids of her models, rendering them gorgeous but blank. The effect is certainly startling, even uncanny—Jean Cocteau's "Orpheus" and Georges Franju's "Eyes Without a Face" both come to mind—but once you recognize the trompe l'oeil its impact quickly deflates. These flesh-and-blood women might as well be dummies, and Simmons has been there before. Through Aug. 9.

Museum of Arts and Design

"Richard Estes: Painting New York City"

It's hard to believe that this is the first home-town museum retrospective for the New York painter, now in his eighties, and it does

an admirable job of complicating our understanding of his so-called photorealism. Although Estes does work from photographs, he doesn't project them onto his canvases or even paint from a single image; seen up close, his panoramas of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Guggenheim, or a busy intersection outside the museum's window demonstrate far more formal innovation than the artist usually gets credit for. Reflections—of the Woolworth building in the roof of a car, or of Estes, with camera in hand, on the Staten Island Ferry—appear as pools and streaks of color. The churning East River becomes a tangle of white and blue. "The Plaza," from 1991, captures the hotel as seen from a bus stopped on Fifth Avenue; the window, extended beyond all M.T.A. standards, acts as a frame-within-the-frame for the deeply complex bisected tableau. There are prints and ephemera here, too, though they feel extraneous. Estes is above all a painter, and, for an art world that seems to have forgotten that mimesis is much more than imitation, he offers a master class in translating the brevity of life into the endurance of art. Through Sept. 20.

Queens Museum

"After Midnight: Indian Modernism to Contemporary India, 1947 / 1997"

The shaky premise of this ambitious show is that Indian art underwent two fundamental changes in the twentieth century—one after independence, the next fifty years later, against a backdrop of neoliberalism and communal violence. After 1947, numerous artists in what was still called Bombay veered away from academic styles and toward abstraction, notably in the murmuring compositions of V. S. Gaitonde, or in fractured, Cubistlike figuration with literary or religious resonances, done best by M. F. Husain. It's hard to credit the contemporary works here with similar radicalism, and several artists serve up politics in objects with little artistic force: Jitish Kallat scorches warped mirrors with the words of a speech by Nehru, while Shilpa Gupta memorializes victims of the conflict in Kashmir with marble slabs. Better are digital works by two smart collaborative groups. In four videos of workers unloading scrap metal, the artists of CAMP indict the shipping industry as a dark side of globalization; a two-screen installation by the always strong Raqs Media Collective contrasts the regimentation of daytime labor with the freedom of Delhi at night. Through June 28.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Neil Selkirk

What unites the subjects of these big, black-and-white photographs is that they're all mothers. Selkirk, a veteran portraitist based in New York, presents them without their children, but he includes a brief wall text about their strength, self-assurance, and "capacity to see through inconsequence to the essence of things." His sitters, nearly all of whom pose comfortably outdoors—on a porch, a front lawn—gaze at the camera with arresting directness. Selkirk's prose may lay it on a bit thick, but his admiration of motherhood in general—and these women in particular—is clearly genuine. Through May 2. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Ann Agee

In this thoroughly winning but overstuffed show, the Brooklyn artist lets loose her deft hands and wild imagination across too many subjects to name. A short list: the British neoclassical architect John Soane's breakfast parlor, seen awash in blue, yellow, and pink, in a fifteen-foot-long painting on paper; porcelain frames so intricately decorative that they give frippery a good name; a rack of silk-screened guidebooks whose languages include Bulgarian and Tamil; a row of beribboned perfume flasks that double as sex toys. There are also Delft-patterned toilets and freestanding



Stanley Whitney's 2011 canvas "Inside Out" (above) is a high point of "The Painter of Modern Life," a boisterous show of works by twenty-one artists, most of them based in New York. It was curated by the writer Bob Nickas, whose imagined conversation with Charles Baudelaire serves as its catalogue. At the Anton Kern gallery through April 11.



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mid-century-looking abstractions. A tighter edit might have enhanced the experience, but the excessive production has feminist overtones—perhaps it's a portrait of having it all. Through April 18. (P.P.O.W., 535 W. 22nd St. 212-647-1044.)

Jitka Hanzlova

The Czech photographer, who has long lived in Germany, is a keen observer, precise and comprehensive but never detached. Previous portraits, landscapes, and street scenes featuring women have established a style that's as restrained as it is emotionally complex. Now Hanzlova tries her approach on horses, seen up close

and in detail: an alert white ear, a half-closed eye, a wet, tousled mane. Even when the animals are seen from a distance, bucking and running, the pictures remain intimate, sensual, and alive. Through May 2. (Richardson, 525 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

Folkert de Jong

Just in time for "Wolf Hall" mania, the Dutch sculptor replicates suits of armor worn by Henri VIII, with the help of some 3-D scanning. Instead of de Jong's usual Styrofoam, these are bronze, with patinas that appear almost holographic from certain angles. The artist also cast the wax passages through which the bronze

flowed, turning the suits into weird hybrids of man and machine. Other sculptures, seen in vitrines—one of them features a man with a gramophone horn stuck to his chest—verge on the theatrical, but de Jong has done well to embrace a more enduring, even classical, medium in his new work, and to let his art ricochet back to the Renaissance. Through April 25. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

Alma Thomas

A substantial showing of more than forty glistering abstractions, on canvas and paper, by the Washington Color School painter, who died in 1978. After

some conventional early paintings, Thomas hit on her signature style of abbreviated brushstrokes arrayed in stripes or circles, in monochrome or multicolored arrangements whose shifting edges make even the most rigorous compositions vibrate. Most of Thomas's mature works are pure abstractions, but in 1970 she allowed herself to dip back into representation, commemorating the moon landing of Apollo 12 with a grid of rainbow markings, whose blues and greens cohere into either the sea of our own planet or a landscape of a new world. Through May 16. (Rosenfeld, 100 Eleventh Ave., at 19th St. 212-247-0082.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Rodrigo Amarante

Previously a member of the Brazilian rock band Los Hermanos and the L.A. trio Little Joy (with Binki Shapiro and the Strokes drummer Fabrizio Moretti), as well as a collaborator with Devendra Banhart, Amarante is an experienced performer. On his own, the thirty-eight-year-old singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist creates music that suggests summer the way that classic bossa nova does. He sings in Portuguese and English, and his songs are intimate without being sentimental. His sound is warm but not washed out, whether it is fully orchestrated or performed solo, with just a guitar. (Rockwood Music Hall, 196 Allen St. 212-477-4155. April 8-9.)

"The French Connection"

The seasoned world-music impresarios of Robert Browning Associates present a mini-festival of traditional Quebecois folk, a transatlantic cousin of Irish, Scottish, and Breton Celtic music. The opening night features the exuberant trio **Le Bruit Court Dans la Ville**, with Lisa Ornstein on fiddle, Normand Miron on button accordion and vocals, and André Marchand on guitar and vocals. The band will perform a set, and

then, during a more sociable portion of the evening, it will be joined by the noted dancer and caller **Pierre Chartrand**. On the second night, the more progressive group **Le Vent du Nord** celebrates the release of its eighth album, "Têtu," a sometimes joyful, sometimes melancholy collection marked by rich vocal harmonies and a mellifluous blend of instruments that includes the hurdy-gurdy, the bouzouki, the mandolin, and the accordion. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. April 10-11.)

Magma

In 1969, the French drummer and composer Christian Vander founded this progressive-rock group, inspired by the music of the deceased saxophonist John Coltrane, as well as by a vision of ecological destruction. The band's first album, from 1970, is about a group of refugees from an environmentally afflicted Earth who colonize a distant planet called Kobaïa, where they live in peace with their surroundings. The Kobaïans are a well-documented people—their escapades have been detailed in the course of ten subsequent studio albums. Adding to the mystery, their tale is sung almost entirely in a language, invented by Vander, called Kobaïan. (It looks faintly Turkish when written and sounds vaguely Teutonic when spoken or sung.) The songs, by turns operatic and jazzy, are often built around short, intricate percussion riffs in the style of the composer Carl Orff, but they are marked most of all by Vander's powerful, virtuosic drumming. Magma's strange, beguiling music is rewarding and, at times, intensely beautiful—even if you aren't fluent in Kobaïan. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. April 13.)

Sufjan Stevens

Stevens has a propensity for folk rock that is lush and sweeping and, at times, deeply complex, but on his seventh studio album, "Carrie & Lowell," he goes for a simple, raw aesthetic. The LP, some of which was recorded on an iPhone, is named

for his late mother, Carrie—a schizophrenic alcoholic who was seldom in his life—and his stepfather, Lowell Brams, a fellow-musician with whom Stevens co-founded his record label, Asthmatic Kitty. The new work is mainly made up of acoustic guitar, piano, and hushed, reverb-drenched vocals. The melodies are painfully pretty, as are the lyrics, which reflect on a broken childhood and the need to save a parent who is already gone. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500. April 11.)

Waxahatchee

Katie Crutchfield, who records and performs under this name, created her early solo material at her parents' home in her native Alabama, close to the creek for which she named the project. She toured extensively in her early twenties, lived in Brooklyn, and now resides in Philadelphia. Her most recent effort, "Ivy Tripp," which comes out this week on Merge, was crafted on suburban Long Island, which she called home last year. Her coy and mournful indie-pop gems reflect an absence of center—in Crutchfield's sensitive hands, wanderlust becomes almost a genre in itself. (Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn 718-486-5400. April 9.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Henry Butler

Gospel, along with New Orleans jazz and R. & B., influence the work of the pianist and vocalist Butler in profound ways, as he laces his playing with soulful flourishes. His most recent recording, "Viper's Drag," found this proud son of the Big Easy collaborating with Steven Bernstein's rambunctious Hot 9 band, but Butler, who is at Minton's on April 9 and April 16, can generate enough excitement to rock a room all by himself. (206 W. 118th St. 212-243-2222.)

Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea

Corea replaced Hancock in Miles Davis's band in 1968, and the two pianists have moved in and out of

each other's musical orbits ever since. Their double-keyboard duet concerts of the late seventies yielded highly regarded live albums, and the two players have returned to that format, touring together for the first time since 1978. If only a fraction of the pianists who were touched by these modernist masters were the sole attendees of their concert at Carnegie Hall, there would be a line out the door. (Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. April 9.)

Heath Brothers

The irrepressible siblings—the eighty-eight-year-old saxophonist **Jimmy** and the seventy-nine-year-old drummer **Albert** (better known as Tootie)—have pressed on with the family band ten years after the passing of their brother Percy, a peerless bassist. With the bassist **David Wong** now firmly entrenched in the group, the Heaths perform authentic and authoritative bebop. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. April 7-12.)

Billie Holiday Tributes

The ne plus ultra of jazz singers would have turned a hundred on April 7th, and musicians are celebrating. Here are a few highlights: Jazz at Lincoln Center pays homage on April 9-11, with a multi-generational show featuring **Andy Bey**, **Molly Johnson**, **Sarah Elizabeth Charles**, and others, at the Rose Theatre. The tribute continues on April 10-11 with **Cécile McLorin Salvant**, at the Appel Room. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.) **Cassandra Wilson**, jazz's reigning diva, is at the Apollo Theatre on April 10. Her new album, "Coming Forth by Day," puts a post-modernist spin on classic Holiday performances. (253 W. 125th St. 800-745-3000.) Also on April 10-11, Minton's, another Harlem venue, hosts its own tribute, with the **JC Hopkins Biggish Band** and such up-and-coming vocalists as **Brianna Thomas**, **Charenee Wade**, and **Jazzmeia Horn**. And on Tuesdays in April, including the big day itself, the hard-working singer **Queen Esther** is at Minton's, with Holiday rarities. (206 W. 118th St. 212-243-2222.)



MOVIES

OPENING ABOUT ELLY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 8. (Film Forum.)

BLACK SOULS

A drama, directed by Francesco Munzi, about a Mafia vendetta in Calabria. Opening April 10. (In limited release.)

CLOUDS OF SILS MARIA

Olivier Assayas directed this drama, about an actress (Juliette Binoche) who becomes emotionally dependent on her assistant (Kristen Stewart). Opening April 10. (In limited release.)

DIOR AND I

A documentary, directed by Frédéric Tcheng, about the haute-couture house and its new chief designer, Raf Simons. Opening April 10. (Film Forum.)

EX MACHINA

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening April 10. (In wide release.)

REBELS OF THE NEON GOD

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening April 10. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

The films of Dick Miller. April 10 at 7: "Gremlins" (1984, Joe Dante). • April 10 at 9:15: "Gremlins 2: The New Batch" (1990, Dante). • April 11 at 7: "Hollywood Boulevard" (1976, Dante and Allan Arkush). • April 12 at 9: "The Howling" (1981, Dante).

BAM CINÉMATEK

"Space Is the Place: Afrofuturism on Film." April 9 at 7: "Space Is the Place" (1974, John Coney) and "Afronauts" (2014, Frances Bodomo). • April 9 at 9:15: "A Joyful Noise" (1980, Robert Mugge). • April 10 at 2 and 7: "The Brother from Another Planet" (1984, John Sayles). • April 11 at 2, 4:30, and 7: "Ornette: Made in America." • April 12 at 5 and 8: "Sankofa." • April 13 at 5:15 and 9:15:

NOW PLAYING

Bay of Angels

What would this film be like without Jeanne Moreau? Even if the dialogue and direction were the same, the meanings wouldn't be. The picture is almost an emanation of Moreau, inconceivable without her. Written and directed by Jacques Demy, it's rather like a French attempt to purify, to get to the essence of, a Warners movie of the thirties. Demy not only gets to it, he goes beyond it. His virtuoso sense of film rhythm turns this flimsy, capricious story about a gambling lady into a lyrical study in compulsion and luck. The concept of gambling as almost total spontaneity and irresponsibility—as giving in to chance (as if that were the most complete acceptance of life)—is oddly suggestive, and we begin, in this film, to feel its appeal, to feel that gambling is a bum's existentialism. And Moreau, in a very Bette Davis sort of way, dramatizes herself superbly. This is a magical, whirling little film, a triumph of style, even though it runs down to nothing in the last, too quick, too ambiguous shot. In French. Released in 1962.—*Pauline Kael* (French Institute Alliance Française; April 14.)

Furious 7

This gleefully kinetic installment of the paramilitary-motors franchise pulls a deep bromantic strain from the real-life drama of its production—the death, midway through filming, of its co-star Paul Walker. He plays Brian, a vehicular warrior who is married to Mia (Jordana Brewster), the sister of his partner-in-arms, Dom (Vin Diesel). The partners are mobilized again—together with the martial artist Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), who is Dom's wife; the class clown Roman (Tyrese Gibson); and the tech wiz Tej (Ludacris)—to combat a double-barrelled assault. The evil Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham) is trying to kill them, and his partner-in-terror, Jakande (Djimon Hounsou), has kidnapped the hacker Ramsey (Nathalie Emmanuel), whose "God's-eye" gizmo can track them across the globe. The federal government—represented by the helmet-coiffed Mr. Nobody (Kurt Russell)—kicks in some equipment, and the chase begins, taking the heroes from Los Angeles to the Caucasus Mountains and Abu Dhabi and back. Along the way, they achieve the impossible with vertiginous style, blending Nascar maneuvers with demolition-derby impact, special-forces exploits with

acrobatic aplomb. The director, James Wan, sends cars repeatedly airborne and seems himself to marvel at the results; the movie's real subject is the stunt work, but its stars' authentic chemistry lends melody to its relentless beat. The wreckage of cities is just a backdrop for the thrill of hard-won victory and the familial bonding that results. Co-starring Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson, swaggering jovially.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Insurgent

In the second film in the "Divergent" trilogy (based on the novels by Veronica Roth), it takes a month of exposition for the action to kick in, but when it does it offers a special-effects spectacle that's something to see. It's set in a future American dystopia that's divided into personality-based "factions" oppressed by a government headed by the tyrannical Jeanine (Kate Winslet). Tris (Shailene Woodley) is among the "divergent"—those with too much moxie for any one slot, who are considered enemies of the state. Facing arrest, Tris, her boyfriend, Four (Theo James), and her brother, Caleb (Ansel Elgort), escape to urban ruins, where Jeanine catches her and subjects her to a series of "sims"—death-defying A.I. adventures that test both character and survival skills, in order to open a mystic box of secrets that will save Jeanine's decadent and shaky regime. These imaginary adventures—which can truly get Tris killed—are the core of the film, and they're wild rides, starting with the snakelike cables that connect and suspend Tris. Many of her acrobatic ordeals take place high above the ravaged skyline, and they're not for acrophobes; the dissolution of her simulated victims into digital detritus is among the film's more memorable gimmicks. There's little substance and little depth, but Woodley, with her preternatural poise, offers a worthy simulation of drama. Directed by Robert Schwentke; co-starring Miles Teller.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

It Follows

The setting of David Robert Mitchell's film is Detroit, and he makes full use of its contrasts: placid suburban neighborhoods give way to the untenanted and the derelict. When the surface of life is so easily cracked, it comes as no surprise that horror, like disease, can worm its way in. So it is that a teen-age girl named Jay (Maika Monroe) inherits a nameless plague. After sex in a car, she finds herself

stalked by one remorseless figure after another; she alone can see them, but they will wipe her out unless she can pass the curse on to somebody else, by carnal means. How you interpret this doomy state of affairs will depend on your response to Mitchell's narrative rhythms; in between the frights that jump out at irregular intervals, he lets the action slide into anomie, as the heroine and her friends, one of whom keeps quoting Dostoyevsky, drift through their bored and all but adultless days. Violent extinction, in such a light, becomes just one of those things. With Keir Gilchrist, as a fine-boned boy who would die for the love of Jay.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/16/15.) (In limited release.)

Ornette: Made in America

Shirley Clarke's 1985 documentary about the seminal jazz innovator Ornette Coleman joins an impressionistic portrait of the musician with an informative overview of his life, work, and ideas. The film's fractured, collage-like composition is anchored by Coleman's 1984 visit to his home town of Fort Worth, where he received official tributes and performed his orchestral work with the local symphony and with his own band. Dramatized reconstructions of his youth, filmed performances from the sixties onward, and discussions with him and other musicians and associates (including William Burroughs and Brion Gysin) mesh with Clarke's diverse array of video manipulations and her flamboyant, rapid-fire editing, which break through the reportorial evidence to evoke the visions and fantasies from which Coleman's music arises. (His discussion of an earlier plan for sexual abstinence is as chilling as it is revealing.) Clarke relates Coleman's grandly transformative multimedia projects (including one involving satellite transmissions) to her own; his troubled effort to rehabilitate a Lower East Side building highlights the free-flowing connection of art and life.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinémathèque; April 11.)

An Oversimplification of Her Beauty

This brisk and self-searching, sharply intelligent and deeply vulnerable romantic comedy is a masterwork of reflexive construction. The young director, Terence Nance, builds the film around his 2006 short, "How Would You Feel?," a love story in the conditional mode, in which he

"An Oversimplification of Her Beauty."

FILM FORUM

"Strictly Sturges." April 10-11 at 12:30, 3:50, 7:10, and 10:20: "Sullivan's Travels" (1941). • April 10-11 at 2:20, 5:40, and 9: "Christmas in July" (1940). • April 12 at 1:10, 4:55, and 8:40 and April 13 at 12:30 and 4:15: "Easy Living" (1937, Mitchell Leisen). • April 12 at 3 and 6:45 and April 13 at 12:30 and 4:15: "Remember the Night" (1940, Leisen).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Art of the Real." April 10: Short-film program, including "Take What You Can Carry" (2015, Matt Porterfield). • April 10 at 9:30 and April 14 at 5: "Naomi Campbell" (2013, Nicolás Videla and Camila José Donoso). • April 11 at 4: Films by Elisabeth Subrin, including "Shulie" (1997). • April 11 at 8:30: "Landscape Suicide" (1986, James Benning). • April 12 at 1:30: "Edvard Munch" (1974, Peter Watkins). • April 14 at 7: "Le Paradis" (2014, Alain Cavalier).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"Haute Couture on Film." April 14 at 4 and 7:30: "Bay of Angels."

IFC CENTER

"Queer/Art/Film." April 13 at 8: "To Sleep with Anger."

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Recent Acquisitions." April 8 at 7: "The Night of Truth" (2004, Fanta Régina Nacro). • April 9 at 4: "The Kite" (2003, Randa Chahal Sabbag). • April 9 at 7:30 and April 12 at 2:30: "Certified Copy" (2010, Abbas Kiarostami).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

The films of Tsai Ming-Liang. April 10 at 7: "Vive l'Amour" (1994). • April 11 at 2: "Boys" (1991). • April 11 at 3:30: "The River" (1997). • April 11 at 6:30: "The Hole" (1998). • April 12 at 6:30: "The Wayward Cloud."



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Satyajit Ray's "The Big City," from 1963, in our digital edition and online.

co-stars with Namik Minter—both playing themselves—to depict the course of their tentative relationship. He interrupts that film to apostrophize, in cinematic chapters, footnotes, and asides, on his romantic history and on the forces that brought the pair to a crossroads. Nance, who has a fine-arts background, elaborates the story with whimsical and enticing animations, multimedia collages, and copious subtitles and intertitles, as well as with an intricate and archly funny and self-revealing monologue. Sensitive and self-doubting, he includes interviews with Minter, her response to public screenings of the short film, and footage that she shot to deliver her own perspective on the relationship. It's as if Nance were filming the couple as nested Russian dolls that pop out with cameras of their own. The entire dazzling panoply of his artistry comes off as a vast performance on the stage of life to woo Minter; romantic obsession has rarely been filmed with such self-perpetuating ingenuity.—*R.B.* (BAM Cinémathèque, April 13.)

Rebels of the Neon God

Tsai Ming-Liang's first feature, from 1992—just released in the U.S.—is a luridly lyrical vision of adolescent rage and lust in Taipei. Tsai's alter ego, Hsiao-Kang (Lee Kang-Sheng), is a frustrated student living with his father, a taxi-driver, and his pious mother, a cook. Two sly motorcycle guys, Ah-Tse and Ah-Ping, steal coin boxes from pay phones and circuit boards from video games and go out with Ah-Kuei, a young woman who works at a roller rink and has a phone-dating job on the side. The core of the story is the tenuous connection that Hsiao-Kang makes with the trio in their rounds of crime and pleasure. His mother likens him to a traditional god, and the comparison feeds both his arrogance and his feelings of abjection; he drops out of school and hits the cheap night spots, fuelling his sexual frustration with a voyeuristic fury aimed at the easy sex of others. With longing gazes, antic and violent outbursts, and exquisite coincidences set amid his fetish objects—leaky pipes and bloody wounds, fast food and bathroom fixtures—Tsai depicts the city as a spontaneous, sticky, erotic ballet. In Mandarin and Min Nan.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Serena

Susanne Bier's new film, set in 1929, marks the third pairing of Bradley Cooper and Jennifer Lawrence, after "Silver Linings Playbook" and "American Hustle." He plays George Pemberton, who runs a logging business in the Smoky Mountains; she plays his wife, Serena, an unusual mixture of nature-loving wild child and platinum blonde, who gazes upon him and declares, "Our love began the day we met." Both actors, gracefully dressed and lightly anguished, draw deep on

their professional aplomb in a bid to keep a straight face; the credible, bulked-up pain that Cooper brought to "American Sniper" seems a world away. The plot, adapted from the novel by Ron Rash, whisks us from detailed worries about bank loans to the symbolic predations of eagles and panthers; if the result hangs together at all, it's thanks to Morten Søborg, the cinematographer, who worked with Bier on the fine films she made in her native Denmark, and who draws out the surreal contrast between Serena's silks and the wood and iron of her surroundings.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

To Sleep with Anger

In Charles Burnett's 1990 succès d'estime, Paul Butler is quietly heroic as Gideon, a man of the South transplanted to Los Angeles, who, with his wife, Suzie (Mary Alice), has raised two sons (Carl Lumbly and Richard Brooks) according to the standards of hard work and old-time religion. Danny Glover gives his best performance—both ticklish and upsetting—as Harry Mention, an old acquaintance from down home who finagles his way into Gideon's family and exposes its fault lines. With his beguiling chivalry, Harry inspires Gideon and Suzie's nostalgia for the surefooted courtliness that has all but disappeared from their fragmented, contemporary lives, then proceeds to unleash forces of discord that bring family antagonisms to a flash point. This eccentric comedy-drama is a truly folkloric film. Burnett and his cast tap depths of mystery, soulfulness, and glee.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center; April 13.)

The Wayward Cloud

It starts with a couple in bed doing lewd things with a watermelon—and then it gets strange. The story concerns a lonely young woman in an oppressively large and quiet Taipei apartment block who dreams of love, and a man who stars in the hard-core porn movie that a video crew is taping on the floor above. In the course of the film, the two protagonists will, so to speak, come together. The director Tsai Ming-Liang's attitude toward sex is provocatively adolescent and mechanical, but the grotesque money shots that punctuate the pensively incremental action are a stand-in for the dramatic and emotional payoffs of more conventional narratives. Tsai's aggressively antic eroticism involves giddily inventive music-video fantasy sequences of loopily choreographed pop tunes, including a Chinese version of "Sixteen Tons" set in a men's bathroom and featuring a man impersonating a penis. If the movie's drama—or even lack of drama—defies credibility, it must nonetheless be seen to be disbelieved. Released in 2005. In Mandarin.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; April 12.)

Welcome to New York

This drama by the director Abel Ferrara is loosely based on the arrest of the

French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn, in 2011, on charges of sexual assault. But Ferrara departs from the specifics to ferocious effect. Gérard Depardieu, ponderously Falstaffian, stars as the statesman Devereaux, who checks into the Carlton Hotel, where, after a night with prostitutes, he presses himself naked on a chambermaid (Pamela Afesi) and, later that day, is arrested. The charges are ultimately dismissed, as they were in real life, but legal guilt isn't Ferrara's subject. Rather, he reveals the terrors of the penal system, a living inferno hidden behind the city's façades and from which its respectable burghers are unduly shielded. While under house arrest in a Tribeca town house, Devereaux is cooped up with his wife, Simone (Jacqueline Bisset), an heiress who has been grooming him to run for President of France. In a spectacular sequence, he cynically contemplates the vanity of power and then confronts her in a flaying battle of mismatched lovers bound together in a death grip. These scenes, which Ferrara films with plain, wide-eyed terror, are bitterly revelatory about sex, marriage, and ambition. Ferrara has repudiated this R-rated cut made by the film's producers, but he needn't worry: the movie packs a singular, agonized vision that seems entirely the director's own. In English and French.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and video on demand.)

While We're Young

In Noah Baumbach's new film, Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts play Josh and Cornelia, a married and childless couple who live in New York and worry that their life together, though comfortable, is no fun. Enter a younger couple, Jamie and Darby (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried), who take them up and teach them the error, or the frozen timidity, of their ways. The movie is at its simplest, and its best, when setting the tired style of the older folk against the pretensions of the hipsters. (Jamie makes a great show, for instance, of refusing to Google, declaring that he would prefer just not to know.) Needless to say, that insouciance begins to fall apart; we get a fussy plot, woven around the fact that both men make documentaries, as does Cornelia's father (Charles Grodin), and that Jamie is not quite the Zen-tinted joy-bringer that he seems. The movie is tilted too far toward the male side of the generational clash; Seyfried is often confined to the wings of the action, and, when Watts is given space on center stage, she leaves us craving more. The film feels more blithe than earlier Baumbach projects, yet it's also his most restless rumination on the theme of age; between the zinging jokes and the customary sprees of music, you can hear the ominous pulse of passing time.—*A.L.* (3/30/15) (In limited release.)

DANCE



A PERFECT STORM

David Neumann learns patience in his new dance-theatre work.

AS HURRICANE SANDY SLAMMED into the eastern United States, in the fall of 2012, something similar happened in the life of the movement-theatre artist David Neumann, and out of it he made a piece called “I Understand Everything Better,” which will be presented, April 15-25, by Abrons Arts Center and the Chocolate Factory.

What happened was the death of both his parents, Honora Fergusson and Frederick Neumann, veteran actors of the experimental theatre company Mabou Mines. David describes his mother as “a tough Irish gal from New England.” When you asked her if she needed something, she said no, she was O.K. And that’s how she died, abruptly and quietly, one night in July, 2012. At that time, Fred Neumann, too, was dying, but not quietly. The process lasted about six months, with episodes of grandeur and dementia. He was a big actor, and he had a big exit. The subject of death was not foreign to him—he was a specialist in, and friend of, Beckett—but he found new things in it. “He would have terrible dreams,”

David, who, with hospice nurses, had taken over his father’s care, says. “He’d wake up and tell me. He was driving in the mountains and there was all this furniture in the road. He didn’t know how to get past it.” (His bed had been moved into the living room.) Meanwhile, on the TV, weathermen would stand on beaches and report that the hurricane was moving north. Jamaica was hit, then Haiti and Cuba. Onward it came. “And I saw a correlation,” Neumann said.

Neumann’s play has a sound score and a dance, as well as text. There are four actors, and the lead (Neumann) contains a cast in himself: a meteorologist, a dying old man, and a second dying old man, King Lear in the storm scene. That character is also a hero from Japanese classical theatre. There is some Kabuki in his show, Neumann says—“the costume changes, the flash”—but more important is Noh drama. “Watching Noh is like looking at an airplane in the sky. It is slow and serene. But if you were up there with it there would be all this noise and black smoke.” In that act of containment, Neumann feels that he found a chastening vehicle for a potentially chest-banging subject. He thinks, also, that Noh reinforced in him the conviction that he has to trust the audience. “I don’t want to try to convince them that they should like my show, or that they should feel something at a certain point. To refrain from that requires patience. I used to have no patience. I’ve learned some.”

And did Fred Neumann learn patience? Did he, as the play’s title seems to say, understand everything better by the end? “I think he came to a peaceful place,” his son says. “It was easy for him to let go.”

—Joan Acocella

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Stephen Petronio Company

Petronio's season at the Joyce inaugurates a plan to include masterpieces by his predecessors alongside his own works. First up is Merce Cunningham's "RainForest" (1968), a cool and crackling vision of a nineteen-sixties wildness, in which dancers behave like animals amid a jungle of helium-filled Mylar balloons. The former Cunningham dancer Melissa Toogood joins the troupe as a ringer. In "Locomotor / Non Locomotor," Petronio balances the thrilling backward motion he introduced last season with torqued action for bodies on stationary feet. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 7-12.)

Dance Theatre of Harlem

The renaissance company returns to City Center, with two programs. Both include the company premiere of "Coming Together," an early, propulsive piece by Nacho Duato, with a driving score by Frederic Rzewski, which incorporates lines written by a victim of the 1971 Attica prison riots. The "What's New!" evening also includes a gem by George Balanchine, "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," while the "Classic DTH" bill closes with "Return," a rousing tribute to the company's survival against all odds, by Robert Garland. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. April 8-11.)

Katie Workum

In "Black Lakes," Workum seeks to transfer a deep attunement between herself and her fellow-performers, Weena Pauly and Eleanor Smith, into a connection between them and their audience. Solo, duet, and trio sections are set, but there's also room for improvisation. (Dance Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. April 9-11.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"Rex Manning Day"

In the fall of 2013, the legendary London music retailer Rough Trade opened an enormous record store and venue in Brooklyn. When teen-agers today see it for the first time, they're likely to think of it as an iTunes library come to life, but for those born in the eighties and earlier visiting the store elicits nostalgia. For many, that sentimental experience will be heightened this week, when Rough Trade is converted into Empire Records, in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the iconic coming-of-age film "Empire Records," about employees who try to stop an independent record store from being sold to a large chain. The event includes a screening of the movie, skits, and performances by local indie bands. The most meta and exciting moment will be a live performance by members of the punk-metal band GWAR, who appear in the film. (64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtradenyc.com. April 8-10.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Now that "The Imitation Game" has brought Alan Turing's tragic story to wide attention, what better time to dust off one of Turing's previously undiscovered notebooks and bring it to auction?

Gillian Walsh

This on-the-rise choreographer has gained attention by handling erotic and pop-cultural material with dry, analytic tools. She has, for example, choreographed butt-cheek isolations according to a rigorous system, appropriating twerking for postmodernism. "Scenario: Script to Perform," her first evening-length work, restricts its four dancers—including Walsh and the ever-compelling Maggie Cloud—to a highly organized series of instructions. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. April 9-11.)

Olga Pericet / "Flamenco Untitled"

The fact that the diminutive flamenco dancer is an infrequent visitor is even more reason to catch this intimate show at the Repertorio Español. Pericet will dance alone, backed by two *cantaors* and a guitarist. Expect to be surprised; besides being a fiery and technically accomplished performer, Pericet is a mercurial presence and a fearless experimenter. (138 E. 27th St. 212-225-9999. April 9-12. Through April 26.)

"E-Moves"

Inspiration provided by Billie Holiday and James Baldwin binds the participants in this edition of Harlem Stage's annual series. Marjani Forté-Saunders and Nia Love imagine a conversation between those two figures. André Zachery employs a live punk band to bring Baldwin's words to life and motion. The free-spirited and multi-talented tap dancer Brinae Ali evokes the psychic wounds of racism in an Afrofuturist mode. Malcolm Low marshalls text, video, and dance to take on no less than the Great Migration of blacks in the mid-twentieth century. (Harlem Stage at the Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240, ext. 19. April 10-11. Through April 18.)

The computing pioneer and cryptanalyst, who committed suicide in 1954, left many of his papers, including this small book—filled with observations on various mathematical theories—to a friend, the late mathematician Robin Gandy. Gandy passed most of the trove on to Cambridge University, but he kept this particular item, perhaps because he had used several empty pages to record his own dreams. The manuscript, which recently resurfaced in a private collection, goes up for auction at **Bonhams** on April 13, along with one of the famous German Enigma machines whose code Turing helped to crack during the Second World War. (580 Madison Ave. 212-644-9001.) • A sale of jewels at **Christie's** (April 14) is led by an eighty-carat diamond and a necklace comprising four strands of rare black pearls, each glowing with differently colored overtones. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

READINGS AND TALKS

McNally Jackson Books

Ann Packer discusses her latest novel, "The Children's Crusade," with the writer Meg Wolitzer. (52 Prince St. 212-247-1160. April 9 at 7.)

"Brooklyn Voices"

This series, organized by Greenlight Bookstore and St. Joseph's College, presents the philosopher and activist Peter Singer. He will discuss his latest book, "The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism is Changing Ideas About Living Ethically," with Michael Specter, a writer for this magazine. (Hill Center, St. Joseph's College, 212 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn. greenlightbookstore.com. April 14 at 7:30.)

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FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB THE DUCK

2171 Second Ave. (212-831-0000)

This rumpled East Harlem bar is not, as it might seem, a mob cover—a dark, eerily empty front room is defended by a gargantuan bouncer, but the place propagates no iniquity other than serving rapscallions of all stripes. Like the Patriot, its sister bar, in Tribeca, the Duck celebrates a merry mood of casual dishabille—once upon a time, patrons of the fairer sex received a free shot for every undergarment removed. On a recent evening, a lintel grapevine of red, white, and blue bras welcomed a group of out-of-towners, who committed the minor misdemeanor of asking for a menu. “We are a super-dive!” Aisha, a sprightly barkeeper wearing a septum ring and a “Brooklyn” cap, said. Cocktail recipes are erratic, but the criminally low beer prices—eight-dollar pitchers, three-dollar drafts—more than balance the equation. After a half-dozen rounds of Pabst, two patrons decided to take an infelicitous conversation outside. An overly decorous Englishman tried in vain to instruct the bartender on a proper Guinness pour—“It has something to do with the nitrogen valve”—when a regular with a soul patch, a ponytail, and ear gauges burst into the conversation with a report from the sidewalk: “The little guy has the Mexican bleeding all over his white shirt! I wouldn’t count on either of them closing out their tab.”

—Jiayang Fan



TABLES FOR TWO

PIZZA, PIZZA

Prova, 184 Eighth Ave. (212-641-0977); Marta, 29 E. 29th St. (212-651-3800).

THE GHOST OF PIZZA PAST haunts Prova. The hulking Italian oven in the back has been compared to a Ferrari and a Stradivarius, but in twelve months two other pie joints that used it closed. One of the co-owners of Prova is also a partner in Sushi Nakazawa, and, with this pedigree, the restaurant emphasizes out-of-the-ordinary toppings for its Neopolitan pizza. Expectations on a recent evening were high for the “Uni-ca,” each slice drizzled with squid ink and garnished with a curl of sea urchin. The mix in temperatures, necessitated by the fact that no one wants warm uni, turned out to be unnerving, even distracting, and, as with all of Prova’s pizzas, the slice was so heavy that it had to be eaten *de Blasio* style, with a knife and fork. And yet this was almost impossible with another pie’s puréed peas and smoked mozzarella, which, as if not entirely set, became a scalding soup, slipping off the crust.

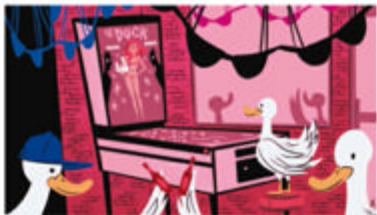
Prova’s promise is “ninety seconds to Naples,” which is perhaps not long enough; at Marta, another new pizza restaurant, it’s more like ninety minutes to Rome. That’s because reservations are hard to come by, which is what happens when Danny Meyer and Nick Anderer, of Maialino, open a place. But the wait, on couches in the lobby with one of the two types of bottle-aged Negronis, is not unpleasant, and, once seated, the service is as crisp as the pizza. “Pizza Romana” translates to a thin crust, like matzo, sturdy enough to handle bold and plentiful toppings. On the puttanesca, anchovies, which announced themselves with a metallic gleam, were even fresher and funkier than expected—more than cursory salt bombs. The *patate alla carbonara*, made moist with cubes of potato, tasted intensely of salt and pepper, worthy adversaries for the pie’s rich layers of egg and two types of cheese.

The flavors at Marta are so assertive that one slice of each pizza is often enough. Fortunately, there are standout dishes across the menu, like the herby, charred rabbit meatballs in a puddle of dreamy ricotta; a stunning, intricate roasted-beet salad with fronds of fried kale sprouts (a new hybrid of Brussels sprout and kale, the vegetable kingdom’s coolest kid); and a slow-roasted lamb shoulder, made in the sizable smoker, stage left of the two pizza ovens, which would be the pride of any restaurant. The icing on the cake, though, is the olive oil on the affogato: poured from high over vanilla gelato at the table, and sap green like spring.

—Amelia Lester

Prova, pizzas \$10–\$29. Marta, pizzas \$14–\$24.

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THE NEW YORKER, APRIL 13, 2015

17

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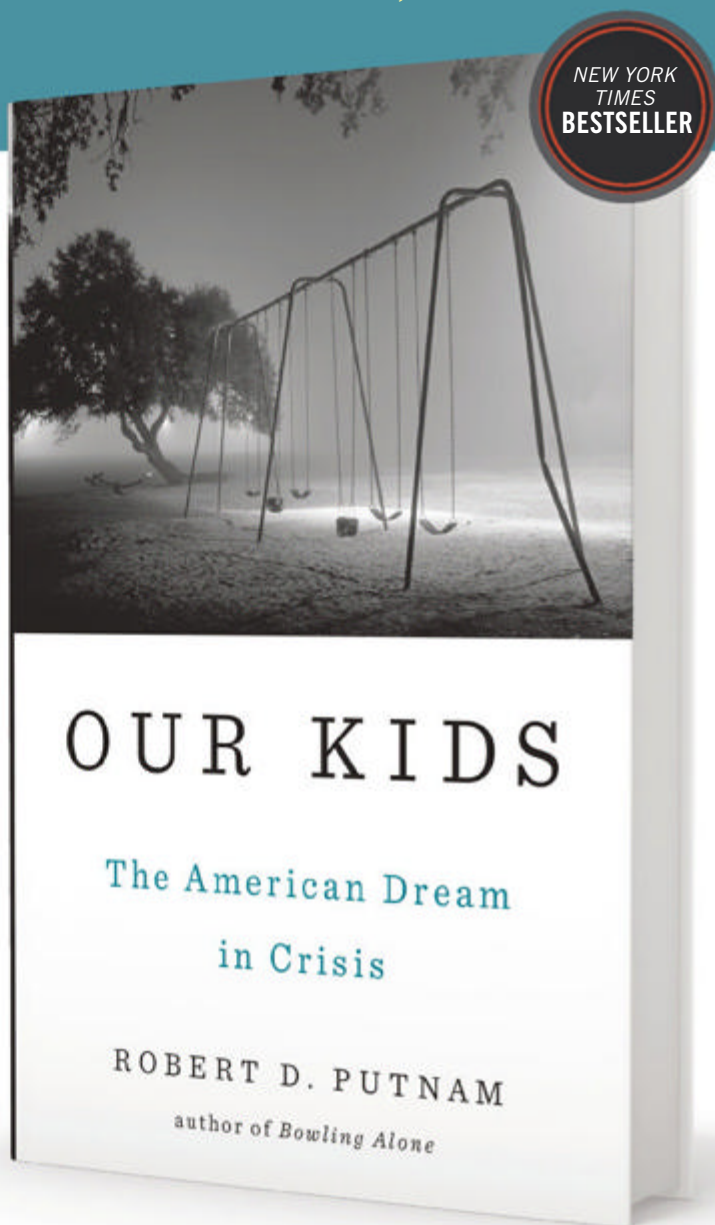
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT MUTE BUTTON

One morning last week, as Washiqur Rahman, a shy, boyish-looking twenty-six-year-old Bangladeshi, left his house in Dhaka and started walking to the travel agency where he worked, three men set upon him with machetes and hacked him to death. The blows rendered his face unrecognizable. Two of the killers were captured by a transgender Bangladeshi beggar who lived nearby and handed over to the police. The killers, madrassa students, didn't know Rahman; they scarcely knew one another. They explained that they had been separately recruited for the job two weeks earlier. Their teacher had said that Rahman was "an anti-Islamic person," they told the police. "It was our responsibility as believers to kill him. So we killed him."

They didn't seem to know what blogging was, and they were not aware that Rahman was a secular blogger who had written critically about radical Islamists. He was part of a small, lively, embattled group of Bangladeshi freethinkers. Shortly before he was murdered, he changed his Facebook picture to the hashtag "#iamavijit." Avijit Roy, a naturalized American citizen, was an outspoken atheist and the founder of the Bengali blog Free Mind. In February, on his way out of a book fair at Dhaka University, where he had gone to promote his book "The Virus of Faith," Roy was killed by three machete blows to the head. Trying to save him, his wife, Rafida Ahmed, was wounded in the head, and one of her thumbs was severed, while onlookers and policemen stood by. The killers got away. For months, Roy had been receiving open threats on Facebook from radical Islamists. In recent years, other independent-minded Bangladeshis have been savagely attacked. The government seems unable or unwilling to protect them, and police investigations seldom produce convictions.

There's nothing remarkable about any of this. Bangladeshis die tragically every day, in political violence and natural or man-made disasters. Citizens everywhere are too frightened or too indifferent to intervene when helpless people are attacked, and governments of all kinds are too corrupt or too craven to render justice. (Perhaps the transgender Bangladeshi was able to act as a human being, rather than as a member of a passive crowd, because she belongs to another ostracized minority.) The deaths of Rahman and Roy would hardly be worth noting, except for the idea that got them killed—one that is indispensable but increasingly endangered around the world.

The value of intellectual freedom is far from self-evident. It's hardly natural to defend the rights of one person over the feelings of a group; to put up with all the trouble that comes with free minds and free expression; to stand beside the very people who repel you. After the massacre at the satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, in January, even defenders of free speech couldn't help wondering why the cartoonists

hadn't just avoided Islam and the Prophet, given the sensitivities involved. Why be provocative? And when freethinkers are a tiny minority in a terribly poor and overwhelmingly religious country on the other side of the world, with no First Amendment or republican tradition of *laïcité*, it's easy to feel that they're admirable eccentrics who speak for nothing and no one beyond themselves—which may explain why they've received so much less attention than their brethren in Paris.

Even in this country, the loathsomeness of an incident in which University of Oklahoma students were caught on video singing a racist song made it seem churlish to argue that their expulsion from a public institution might be unconstitutional. Creating a "hostile



environment” is what the Bangladeshi bloggers stood accused of. Hate-speech regulations put actual feelings, often honorable ones, ahead of abstract rights—which seems like common sense. It takes an active effort to resist the impulse to silence the jerks who have wounded you.

In a blog post, Rahman, using gently withering irony, addressed the notion that people like him are the problem, and that if only he would show some restraint things could settle down: “No, I will not write about war crimes, Islamic extremism, the country, or politics anymore. Writing does not change anything anyway; it serves only to appease the rage in my heart. Even then, writing is said to hurt people’s feelings, ruin the ‘peace,’ and impede progress. Therefore I should write only about topics that nobody would take any offense at.” So he set out to write about plants, education, movies, love, and himself—except that each of these inevitably led him into controversies that, he said, would bring down the wrath of the majority. He then asked, “Can someone tell me which topic I should choose to keep the government, the political parties, the Islamists, the general public, the groups in favor and in disfavor of independence, happy? Is there anybody with any ideas?”

Joel Simon, the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, argues in his book “The New Censorship” that the explosion of data in digital media keeps us from seeing how extensively information is controlled. “Repression and violence against journalists is at record levels,” he writes, “and press freedom is in decline.” The worst cases include China (which became the world’s top jailer of journalists in 2014), Iran (No. 2), Eritrea, Turkey, and Egypt, but threats and killings are epidemic in the Middle East, South Asia, and Mexico. In Pakistan and elsewhere, blasphemy laws and mob rule make the subject of religion off-limits to all but the very brave. Islamic State-style terrorism has made whole

regions lethal for journalists—for the notion of speaking one’s mind.

But, in some ways, an even greater danger than violence or jail is the internal mute button known as self-censorship. Once it’s activated, governments and armed groups don’t have to bother with threats. Here self-censorship is on the rise out of people’s fear of being pilloried on social media. In Russia, Vladimir Putin has been masterful at creating an atmosphere in which there are no clear rules, so that intellectuals and artists stifle themselves in order not to run afoul of vague laws and even vaguer social pressure. A Russian filmmaker, having agreed to remove cursing from her latest movie, assured the *Times*, “We dubbed it again, and I actually think it became even better.”

In Putin’s Russia, as in Narendra Modi’s India and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Turkey, majorities are on the side of silent conformity, and respect for dissent is disappearing under waves of nationalism. In India, books are frequently withdrawn after publication because of dubious legal cases brought on behalf of supposedly aggrieved groups. Last year, to settle a lawsuit, Penguin Books India—part of the world’s largest trade publisher—agreed to recall and pulp the critically acclaimed work “The Hindus: An Alternative History,” by Wendy Doniger. As part of the settlement, Penguin had to affirm that “it respects all religions worldwide”—a nice sentiment that has nothing to do with intellectual freedom.

The problem with free speech is that it’s hard, and self-censorship is the path of least resistance. But, once you learn to keep yourself from voicing unwelcome thoughts, you forget how to think them—how to think freely at all—and ideas perish at conception. Washiqur Rahman and Avijit Roy had more to fear than most of us, but they lived and died as free men.

—George Packer

THE BOARDS SHOW GOES ON



In the third act of Chekhov’s 1901 masterpiece, “Three Sisters,” a character looks out a window at the aftermath of a terrible fire and says, “Completely wiped out—everything burned to the ground.” Two Thursdays ago, a little after 3 P.M., the third-year students of N.Y.U.’s Tisch School of the Arts graduate acting program were rehearsing that scene at their theatre space, on Second Avenue at Sixth Street. There were five hours to go before the opening-night performance. Suddenly, the building shook. A half block north, an explosion had occurred, igniting a

conflagration that immediately brought down two buildings.

In the Chekhov play, the weary Prozorov sisters and their soldierly comrades scramble to salvage what they can of their house and to aid the dispossessed. That afternoon, there was a similar kind of scramble. Forced by the city to hastily evacuate 111 Second Avenue, the actors, the crew, the designers, and the director—Graduate Acting Chair Mark Wing-Davey—trudged to their classroom facilities, at 721 Broadway, to regroup; their opening night would have to be cancelled. Brian Bock, who played Colonel Vershinin, the battery commander, said, “Some of us were stiff-upper-lipped; some were hysterically upset. The rest were in denial. We either felt sad or felt guilty for feeling sad.” Carlos Dengler, another of the actors, said he noticed “that 9/11 smell in the air.”

The students had been workshop-

ping “Three Sisters” for three years. They had initially rehearsed the play as a classroom project; the next year, they filmed parts of it. The version set to open on the night of the explosion was actually one of two separate full productions in repertory: one set in 1901, the other set in 1988, during the waning days of glasnost. The students played different roles in each version.

Friday brought no better news for the cast: the city had cordoned off Second Avenue—there would be no access to the theatre, nor to the costumes, the set, the makeup, or the props. Wing-Davey decided that the show must go on. “Everyone wanted to embrace that mentality,” Christopher Metzger, the costume designer, said. “But no one was quite sure how to do that.”

At 721 Broadway, the “Three Sisters” cast commandeered a half-constructed set that was being used for another school



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production. They held a quick rehearsal to reblock and re-cue the play. A rudimentary light plot was rigged. Street clothes replaced period costumes. The props—so important in Chekhov—were locked away on Second Avenue, so the cast improvised: an Aeron chair became a perambulator, yoga mats became couches, a push broom became a nineteenth-century camera tripod. A gunshot—essential to the plot—was produced by slamming two yoga blocks together offstage.

Survival instincts got the actors through Friday night's performance of the 1988 version in the makeshift space. But there were four more performances scheduled for the weekend, to be attended by friends, relatives, and industry scouts. Might the troupe be able to return to Second Avenue? The city stood firm: no access, not even to fetch props and costumes. A Saturday-morning guerrilla run-through was called for the 1901 version; Metzger ransacked the N.Y.U. costume closets for period-appropriate clothing. Rehearsal ended at 1 P.M.; the matinee started at 2.

Wing-Davey made a curtain speech before each of the four performances: "There will be some minimal lighting, clothes, and sound. Nonetheless, the essential flavor and characteristics of the production will be discernible. But this will be the most dramatic performance of all, because it really involves *your* imagination." The houses were packed, and each performance received a standing ovation. "This must have been what it was like to put up a play during some kind of wartime disaster in Europe," Dengler said.

Four days after the explosion, the police allowed the company back into its space on Second Avenue. I.D.s had to be shown at the barricades. It was a sombre homecoming. Only the day before, the remains of two victims of the explosion had been recovered. Emma Duncan, who is from suburban Chicago and played the youngest sister, Irina, said, "Second Avenue has been our neighborhood during our training here. When something like this happens in your home, and you're telling a story *about* your home, the air changes."

The students were able to stage the last three performances of "Three

Sisters" on their own set, with the original props and costumes. At the final performance of the 1988 version, Colonel Vershinin, covered in soot, sank into a sofa (an actual one, this time) and said, with a sigh, "If not for my men, the whole town would have burned down." A fire-engine siren wailed. It was hard to tell whether it was a sound cue.

—Laurence Maslon

DEPT. OF NEIGHBORS WILY



New York has always attracted outsiders. Last Monday, one showed up on the rooftop of LIC Bar, in Long Island City. Neighbors noticed a fur coat slinking around: a coyote. Someone called the authorities. Sarah Aucoin, the director of the Urban Park Rangers, was among the first to hear the news. "It probably came over the Triborough Bridge," she said. "The bar had a band called the Coyote Anderson Quartet playing that night. It was too weird." After a while, the coyote hopped onto an adjacent rooftop and vanished.

Twenty years ago, there were virtually no coyotes with New York City addresses, but they have been coming down from Westchester lately, making their way through green corridors of restored parkland, where there's good eating. "A breeding pair establishes a territory, and the young disperse, looking for new territories," Aucoin explained. There have been a dozen coyote sightings in New York City in the past year. They like golf courses, favoring the fairways in Pelham Bay Park, where many have been spotted around the greens, chasing golf balls. This winter, a female, dubbed Riva by the N.Y.P.D., appeared on a basketball court in Riverside Park, near Seventy-fourth Street. A coyote was seen heading toward the Lincoln Tunnel. A few have turned up on the campus of Columbia University. In late January, one was found near Stuyvesant Town. "Stuy Town is no place for a coyote," Aucoin said.

On a recent Saturday, the rangers

hosted a presentation on coyotes at the Van Cortlandt Nature Center, in the Bronx. Adelaida Duran Ruiz, a.k.a. Ranger Deli, stood at the front of the room, which was packed with adults in zip-up fleeces and a couple of enthralled kids. The rangers wore cargo pants, neckties, and ranger hats. Four questions were scribbled on a whiteboard, which Ranger Deli read aloud: "Do you want to learn about coyotes?" "Do you want to coexist with coyotes?" "Would you like to see a coyote?" "Are you afraid of coyotes?" Hands went up for the first three; there was no reaction to the fourth. "It's O.K. to admit!" a ranger called out from the back. That was Jessica Carrero, who has seen nine coyotes—more than any of her colleagues. "I have been a ranger for twenty-seven years," Ranger Deli said. "In all those years, I have seen one *once*."

Ranger Deli outlined key coyote facts. They are grayish brown, they have yellow eyes, and they eat a lot of rodents. "This means we should be happy to have them here, so they can eat the



City coyote

rats and mice," she said. In spring, females give birth, and the parents venture out in search of food. City coyotes are hardy. "There's about a sixty-percent chance of a coyote getting to be one year old in a city," Carrero said. "Most of those who die are going to be killed by cars." She added, "A twelve-year-old coyote is really rare. That particular coyote is really, really good at crossing the street."

Coyotes are smart. Wily? "I'd say wary is a better word for them," Aucoin

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said. Ranger Deli explained what to do if you see one and it's displaying nuisance behavior (that's a technical term). "What you are going to do is appear bigger than you are, start making noises, and back away," she said. "Do not turn around and run."

A seventy-five-year-old woman named Rose told the rangers that she often sees a coyote on her morning walks (and once, recently, on Broadway and 251st Street). The group headed off to follow Rose's regular trail. Judy Judd, who has long gray hair and wore jeans tucked into boots, kept her eyes open. She'd spotted the coyote that was picked up in Riverside Park this winter. "There were about three hundred people who called," she said. "I was not among them, because I want that coyote to eat the rats."

Lynn Kraus, a friend of Judd's, said that she saw one in Riverside Park a few years ago. "He was gorgeous," she said. "I guess he had his winter coat still. Just a perfect physical specimen of a coyote. I've seen them in the Southwest, and they're pretty small. But this one was pretty damn impressive."

Judd nodded. "I had a dog that was half coyote," she said. "I lived in New Mexico." She continued, "That dog could climb over anything. It was the only dog I ever had to tell to get off the refrigerator."

The group followed the rangers back to the Nature Center. "They tend to use train tracks as their highways," Kraus said. "They're on their way to Long Island. They've made it to Suffolk County." "The Hamptons?" someone asked. Judd nodded. "And I can't say I blame them."

—Betsy Morais

UP LIFE'S LADDER ART AND COMMERCE



A group of high-school students from Friends Seminary arrived the other day at the David Zwirner Gallery, on Nineteenth Street, for a crash course in how to sell art. The buyers, it was hoped, would be their mothers and fathers, at a cocktail party later that evening. Friends (students, 761; tuition, \$38,300) was founded in 1786 by Quakers. It has an artsy reputation; alums include Liev Schreiber, Vera Wang, and Wylie Dufresne. The teen-agers were to receive talking points on some sixty-six art works, collectively valued at five hundred and forty thousand dollars, that had been donated by gallerists, artists, and collectors (many of them Friends parents), for an auction to raise money for financial aid and school programs.

Tanya Traykovski, who has a son in the third grade and degrees in art history, had volunteered to prep the student docents. "If you're in a bind and don't remember much about the artist, feel free to just look at the works and say what you feel about them," she counselled.

Willa, a junior with wavy hair and a ripped hoodie, said that her favorite work in the gallery was a Marlene Dumas lithograph of Billie Holiday. "But I don't know what I'll say about it," she said. "I think she's from South Africa? And she paints . . . singers." They walked up to an untitled piece by Carol Bove—peacock feathers affixed in a grid to a linen

canvas. (The presale estimate was a hundred and twenty thousand dollars, and it sold for significantly more.) Traykovski said, "A lot of her works are difficult to live with in a New York City apartment, but this one's not, which is great." She added, "My husband and I collect her." She explained that Georg Baselitz was the most famous artist represented. "He's also a Friends grandparent." She continued, "After the war, you have collective trauma, collective guilt."

Sounds like high school. Did the kids like Friends? "It's hard to ask any junior that," Anna, a junior in a floral skirt, said glumly.

A preppy fellow named Reid practiced his spiel about a drawing of a naked man trapped in a tiny room. "This is a David Shrigley," he began. "His drawings are usually accompanied by humorous text"—in this case, "I hate being indoors"—"and I'm not really sure, but I would like to guess that he drew this during the winter. I feel like this is something that artists would struggle with—not being able to work outside or with a lot of other people." Reid asked, "Did I talk a little too long? I talked a *little* too long."

Over spring break, he'd be looking at colleges in the Pacific Northwest—Lewis & Clark, Reed. He was considering studying art history. But, he said, "Honestly, sometimes I feel like the art world can be a little too pretentious."

A senior named Miranda, who had on a Chanel T-shirt, said, "You can come visit me at Middlebury slash Georgetown. Those are my two top choices—international relations, that's my thing."

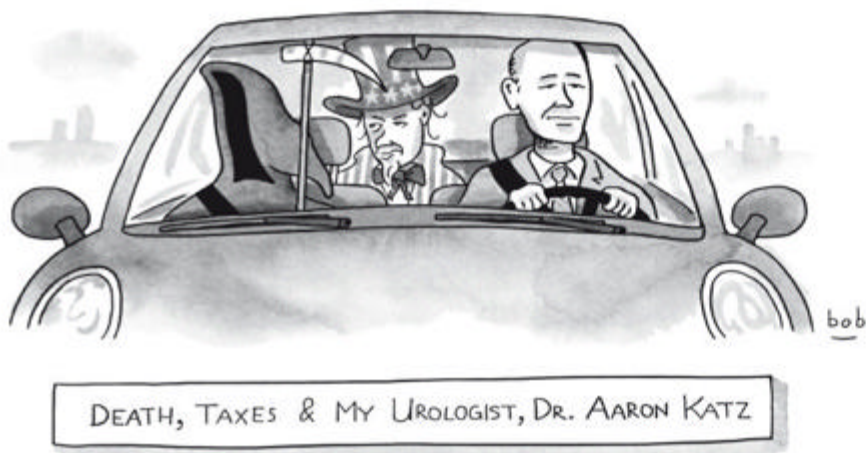
Willa: "She does Amnesty International."

Guests began to arrive. A blond woman wearing a black cocktail dress and a ring with a gem the size of a kumquat approached Reid and asked about the Bove.

"Bove is a Brooklyn-based artist," Reid said. "She has a massive studio in Red Hook." The woman looked at the price sheet and noticed the estimate.

"Ay!" she screamed. Reid moved along to a Peter Doig etching (presale estimate: \$3,000). "Oh, this is in my price range," the woman said. "Under ten thousand dollars, we're good. I don't really like it, though."

Anna, the glum junior, led another bejewelled woman, who had children in



the first and fifth grades, to a print by the Swedish artist Mamma Andersson. “She’ll make art out of these barren landscapes, but it kind of has a mystical twist to it,” Anna said.

The woman said, “When I was in high school, in rural North Carolina, I was not educating people about amazing art.”

The gallerist, David Zwirner, whose daughter will leave *Friends* for Barnard this year, recalled, “I went to high school in Germany. The schools are almost exclusively public. An all-public system is much better, much fairer.” He added, “If you go to public school in the Bronx, I don’t think you’ll have this.”

Miranda chatted with Micah Morris, the chair of the *Friends* language department. She asked him, “Did I tell you I’m doing a senior project? Learning how to make all sorts of pastries and whatnot. And I’m going to blog about it in French.”

Anna’s mother, a jewelry designer, hugged her daughter. “How’s it going?” she asked.

“It’s good,” Anna replied. “No one really wants to talk to us. And it’s a little dangerous, since you don’t know who’s a major art collector and who, like, doesn’t know anything.” She showed her mother a small painting of an island by Sebastian Black. Her mother leaned in close. Anna rolled her eyes and said, “*Mom*, you need your glasses.”

—Emma Allen

THE MUSICAL LIFE NEW TRANSLATION



The title of the Egyptian funerary papyrus “Book of the Dead” is more accurately translated as “Coming Forth by Day.” It was called “Book of the Dead” by Wallis Budge, who translated the manuscript for the British Museum, in 1895. “Coming Forth by Day” is also the title of Cassandra Wilson’s new record, which is an homage to Billie Holiday, who would have turned one hundred on April 7th.

The other morning, Wilson visited the Egyptian wing of the Met, waiting in the security line among schoolchild-

dren on field trips. She has long, caramel-colored hair, and she wore large dark glasses with black frames. The night before, she had flown in from Paris, and she wasn’t feeling great. “I need a Bloody Mary,” she said. “That’s my regimen when I have an upset stomach.” At the café, though, she bought a water instead and sat at a table by one of the windows looking out on Central Park.

“Jazz musicians in Jackson, Mississippi, introduced me to Holiday’s music,” Wilson said. “I grew up in Jackson, and I went to Millsaps College there in the seventies, but I didn’t graduate. I was studying philosophy, and when we got to Hegel’s dialectics I thought, This is the perfect time for me to get out of here. Hegel was driving me crazy.”

Outside, on the lawn, a dog scattered a flock of sparrows. “I started performing her song ‘God Bless the Child,’ which has the line ‘that’s got his own,’” Wilson continued. “My mother used to say that to me—‘that’s got a job.’ My mother was a teacher. My father was a musician. He started off playing the violin. He had lessons beginning around the age of seven, then he picked up playing the trumpet in the Army band. He was from a place called Chicago Heights. He grew up among people who were Scots-Irish, Jewish, and Creole. When I say Creole, I mean black people who separated themselves from black society because of the color of their skin. They used to have brown-bag parties. You were in if your complexion was lighter than a brown paper bag. My father went down South to get away from all that. He met my mother at a dance at Camp Shelby, in Hattiesburg. He went overseas, and when he came back they were married. My mother was very, very dark, richly dark. In a family album, I found a photograph of Billie Holiday, taken at a party in Chicago with my aunt, my father’s sister. You can see layers of expression in Holiday’s face. There’s a smile on top, but beneath the surface there’s a kind of world-weariness. She was accepted by Creole society, and she recognized it in my aunt, but I think she was bored to death by the narrowness.”

Wilson decided that it was time to visit the Egyptian wing. “I’ve been fascinated by Egyptology for ten years,” she said. “Ancient Egypt was called Kmt. Their language didn’t have vowels, much

like Hebrew. The Greeks called the people from Kmt the Aegyptios. ‘Kemet’ is how you refer to the culture. The Kemetics didn’t believe in death. They believed that you were always coming back and forth from the unknown to the actual. Going to the afterlife they referred to as ‘westing,’ since the sun set in the west. For me, the thought of Billie Holiday’s spirit being reinvented in the twenty-



Cassandra Wilson

first century connected with the concept of returning, of coming forth by day.”

Approaching the Temple of Dendur, Wilson said, “Before this record, I recorded a few songs of hers, including ‘Don’t Explain,’ but I’ve often balked at the lyrics, because I’m not that kind of woman. She sings, ‘Cry to hear folks chatter, and I know you cheat/right or wrong, don’t matter, when you’re with me, sweet.’ I say, ‘Don’t want to hear folks chatter about you trying to cheat/right or wrong it matters, if you want my sweets.’ I think she would be like that now. She was a very powerful woman.”

By the reflecting pool, Wilson examined a statue that was missing a nose. “The figures we have from Greece and Rome, you don’t see a lot of noses missing,” she said. “They may be missing arms and legs, but mostly they have their noses. When Napoleon got to Egypt, they say he was so incensed by the Africanoid features on the statues that he had the soldiers knock the noses off.”

Recalling the Billie Holiday photograph in her family album, she said, “I never thought to ask my father why it was there.” The questions one never thought to ask the dead pile up.

—Alec Wilkinson

DREAM TEAMS

Professional sports bets on the changing nature of fandom.

BY BEN McGRATH



In the fall of 1979, while on a flight from Hartford to Austin, the writer Daniel Okrent was struck by an idea for conducting an auction of baseball players—or, rather, baseball players' names and their future statistics. Nothing fancy: this was before the spread of personal computers and sabermetrics. His notion was that, using only the stats that could be tallied or figured from the box scores in the morning paper, you could approximate the potency of a virtual team, compare it against other virtual teams, and thereby imagine yourself as a real-life general manager in training. "It was because I was a shitty athlete," he recalled recently. Fantasizing about what

it would be like to play third base was too implausible. In Austin, he accompanied a few editors and writers from *Texas Monthly* to a barbecue joint, where he revealed the outlines of his new scheme. They weren't interested. Fall gave way to winter. Okrent mentioned the idea to some friends over lunch at a French restaurant in Manhattan, and this time it took. Instead of Brisket League Baseball, we got Rotisserie, named after La Rotisserie Française, a long-vanished eatery on East Fifty-second Street.

The entry fee for the initial ten-team Rotisserie League, in 1980, was two hundred and fifty dollars, and the winner, at season's end, would collect half

of the over-all pot. Okrent feared that this might make them gamblers—*personae non gratae*—in the eyes of the sport's custodians. He was planning to write a book, later published as "Nine Innings," that would be a micro-examination of a single baseball game, between the Milwaukee Brewers and the Baltimore Orioles. The project required extensive clubhouse access. To be safe, they confined their Rotisserie auction to players from the National League, rendering the Brewers and Orioles irrelevant. "A guy I came to know in the American League president's office said it was absolutely the right thing to do," Okrent said. "You know the moralism they've always brought to the very idea of gambling."

There was another virtue to the National League restriction. Okrent had grown up a fan of the Detroit Tigers, in the A.L., and he worried about the potential for conflicting loyalties—not just overpaying for the Tigers' ace Jack Morris, say, out of wishful thinking, but depending on some of the Tigers' best-known adversaries for the success of the Okrent Fenokees, as he called his squad. The childish simplicity of sports rooting had always seemed one of fandom's greatest virtues, and he was grateful to be able to separate watching the Tigers from managing the Fenokees.

The other founding Rotisserians, like Okrent, were well connected—writers, editors, academics—and word of their new pastime spread quickly, attracting imitators. Within a few years, baseball officials had a genuine nuisance on their hands: "the number of people calling the P.R. department and pretending to be journalists, asking whether the pitcher's arm was still hurt," as Okrent put it. Those callers weren't gamblers, either; they were Okrent's proliferating disciples, looking for inside intel to exploit on the virtual trading block.

Card-based simulations, like Strat-O-Matic, which now boasts of producing "the original fantasy sports games," had existed since the nineteen-sixties, but they relied exclusively on past events and didn't flatter the sports fan's unshakable sense of clairvoyance. Strat-O-Matic contests were truly imaginary. Rotisserie was grounded in reality. Actual human beings were affirming (or disproving) your hunches and investments

But what about the home team? Will fantasy sports usurp the real thing?

in real time. Okrent and company trademarked the name Rotisserie (thus giving birth to “fantasy” as a generic alternative), began publishing guidebooks, and even hosted conventions during spring training. “People would come from around the country to stay at the Bellevue Biltmore Hotel, in Clearwater, and spend time with us,” Okrent recalled. “Very creepy. They were not people you’d want to take home.” What he meant, in essence, was that the expanding audience was not composed of intellectuals, like the pioneers, but standard-issue geeks, who had embraced their new hobby with a Dungeons & Dragons-like fervor. By the early nineties, when I was in high school, the concept had proved durable—and flexible—enough that a few seniors were playing what they called Rotisserie Cross Country, using the running times of gangly sixteen-year-olds in Bergen County, New Jersey, as fodder for study-hall competitions.

By the late nineties, with the arrival of the Internet, the concept had spread to football and had spawned a full-blown industry, with an official lobbying arm—the Fantasy Sports Trade Association. The F.S.T.A. created a Fantasy Sports Hall of Fame and honored Okrent and his friend Glen Waggoner, another writer and the winner of the first-ever Rotisserie crown, back in 1980, as its inaugural inductees. “You couldn’t have paid me to go,” Okrent said of the ceremony, which took place in Orlando. He had by then become disillusioned with his billion-dollar creation, for which, he now estimates, he and his fellow-founders have each banked “maybe ten thousand dollars, fifteen thousand dollars, something like that,” for all their prescience.

He had also temporarily shuttered the Okrent Fenokees, who never did win a championship, out of fantasy fatigue. “In the first year or two you’re playing, you are much more engaged with baseball than you’ve been since you were seven years old,” Okrent said. “And then, by your fourth or fifth year, the actual game has lost meaning for you. You’re engaged in the numbers that the game spins out and engaged with millions of others in the same way. It has no relationship not just to the fan attachment that you may have had to a particular team but to the physical thing that’s taking place on the

field. It’s the representation of it in a number that’s what’s important. I’m thinking of our original group. A couple of them really don’t give a shit about baseball at all anymore.” He added, “When people say, ‘How do you feel, having invented this?’ I say, ‘I feel the way that J. Robert Oppenheimer felt having invented the atomic bomb.’ I really do. I mean, pretty terrible!”

A couple of months ago, I attended the winter conference of the F.S.T.A., in Las Vegas, and detected an air of triumphant ascendancy, as though the future of sports itself lay in the hands—or in the obsessive brains—of the nearly four hundred people swapping waiver-wire strategies and business cards at the Bellagio. After years of being dismissed as a lesser breed of sports fan, the fantasy crowd had proved its strength in numbers: some forty million participants in North America, including eight million women. More important, though, was the belated embrace of the professional teams and leagues, which had initially sought to distance themselves from an activity that seemed so transparently parasitic. In the Internet age, where enthusiasm and loyalty can be measured in terms of media minutes consumed, the best kind of customer is not the polymath with a wry disposition and an ability to charm the in-laws but, rather, a junkie. Primordial sports fans, content to watch athletics as theatre, devote a mere six hours a week, on average, to the consideration of balls and pucks. Fantasy nerds do triple that. And then there are people like Jeremy Munter.

Munter, a.k.a. Muntradamus, is a lanky and slightly manic twenty-seven-year-old who moved to Las Vegas a couple of years ago so that he could “be in my own cloud, my own zone,” as he told me, “and not answer to anyone and just focus on dominating fantasy sports.” The genre of fantasy sports that he is intent on dominating bears only a vestigial relationship to Okrent’s original idea. Instead of joining leagues, among friends and colleagues, you participate in nationwide tournaments, some with tens of thousands of entrants—and, crucially, winners are crowned, and paid, just hours after you’ve created your team, on the basis of the players’ performances in an evening’s worth of games. With daily

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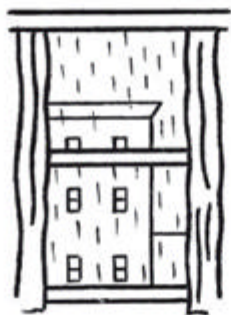
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fantasy, as these contests are called, any odd Tuesday can be your Stanley Cup or your World Series, although the repeatable and impersonal nature of the format attracts a more compulsive clientele. Munter has been known to create two hundred teams in a night, at two dollars apiece, preferring a low-risk, high-volume approach, like a day trader. “First fifty teams I make, I won’t even do a spreadsheet,” he said. “I’ll look at the players and just know—like, K. J. McDaniels, that’s a good price for him. Tony Wroten, that’s a good price.” (The entrance fees are real, but the “salaries”—subject to a cap, just as in the N.B.A.—remain notional.)

Munter comes by his expertise laboriously: for a start, by watching six hours of live sports every day. Around 4 P.M., when the first basketball or baseball games on the East Coast typically begin, he arrives at the Westgate sports book, with its two dozen screens, and he doesn’t leave until the end of the last of the West Coast games, around ten o’clock. “I’ll make sure to pick someone on every team,” he said. “Like, I’ll pick Tony Allen just so I can have one game where the Memphis Grizzlies matter.” Once the games are finished, he hits the gym, to relieve all the pent-up anxiety, and then he loads up on coffee and Red Bull so that he can crunch numbers for the next day’s schedule till 5 A.M. When he wakes up, around noon, he checks Rotoworld.com, a comprehensive recasting of sports news through a fantasy filter. He has forty thousand Twitter followers and says he charges people who don’t want to submit to his gruelling schedule four hundred dollars a week for daily roster suggestions.

Daily-fantasy taxonomists speak in terms of sharks, whales, and fish, or professionals, high rollers, and lunch meat. Muntradamus is a minor shark—he serves the whale population his advice while snacking on minnows. When we first met, he was standing in a bar near the craps tables at a party hosted by FanDuel, the most popular daily-fantasy platform, which awarded more than five hundred million dollars in cash

prizes last year and plans to approach \$1.5 billion this year. Elsewhere in the bar were a few well-known great whites, Drew Dinkmeyer and Al Zeidenfeld, who have brought sophisticated mathematical modelling to the task. And, over by the side, maintaining a low profile, was FanDuel’s C.E.O., Nigel Eccles, a trim, sandy-haired forty-year-old Northern Irishman who likes to say that his company’s mission is to transform the way we watch sports in the United States.



Eccles grew up on a dairy farm in County Tyrone and is an unabashed wonk, like so many sports executives these days. His sport of choice is distance running. He used to work at McKinsey. “People talk to us about the Super Bowl,” he told me, shortly before the party began. “We’re like, ‘Look, the Super Bowl is the one event that people don’t need a fantasy game for, because it’s compelling in itself.’ What needs fantasy is those games that nobody cares about, particularly in basketball and baseball, where it’s a long season. Those are the ones that need fantasy to create the interest, and that’s our bread and butter.”

In a sense, Eccles and Okrent were in agreement: there was a dearth of interest in the actual games, and the “ancillary event,” as Eccles put it, referring to fantasy, “has become so big that it’s in some ways eclipsing the core event.” Throughout the long seasons, FanDuel’s users average more than twenty-four hours of sports consumption a week, an increase of forty per cent over the audience for traditional fantasy, which daily partisans and old-timers alike have begun calling “season-long.” For example, the industry analyst who delivered the conference’s keynote address said, “In five or ten years, people will be asking, ‘Who used to do season-long? What was season-long?’”

Daily fantasy is one of those ingenious ideas that seem obvious and inevitable in retrospect, but it might never have existed were it not for a convergence of lobbying during the second term of the George W. Bush Administration on the part of the National Football

League and the Christian right, both of which opposed the spread of offshore sports betting enabled by the Internet. Their efforts led to the passage of the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006, a hastily appended rider to a port-security bill. UIGEA, commonly pronounced “you-EE-juh,” sought to block financial institutions from processing payments associated with offshore gaming and was later used to stamp out the booming business of online poker in this country. But the law also included an explicit “carve-out,” as fantasy entrepreneurs say, for fantasy-sports “games of skill,” thanks to the N.F.L., which had recognized that a casual fan’s vested interest in yardage counts and sack totals might well keep him from changing the channel in the garbage minutes of a 34–7 blowout. Better for ratings, better for ad revenues.

FanDuel was founded in 2009, as an offshoot of Hubdub, a news-prediction site that Eccles, his wife, Lesley, and three other partners had established a year earlier, in time for the 2008 Presidential election. Hubdub offered users virtual cash with which to bet on the outcome of real events, channelling the wisdom of crowds. “We predicted all fifty states, the same year as Nate Silver,” Eccles said. “But we didn’t get quite as much publicity.” They didn’t make any money, either, and, as they looked into refocussing their business model, they noticed that the genre of news that was consistently attracting the most predictive activity on the site was the one that they’d included as an afterthought: sports. UIGEA provided them some legal cover to explore paid prediction games, as long as those games didn’t hinge on the outcome of any individual sporting contest or on the performance of an individual athlete—potentially corrupting scenarios, given the incentive for tampering. And there was a ready audience of probabilistic speculators, in the form of displaced online poker players, with an established track record of spending money to make money online. Not long ago, a professional poker player I know e-mailed to say that he’d passed much of the previous month “trying to prepare a profitable daily fantasy model” for the upcoming baseball season. UIGEA has become a law of unintended consequences.

There are now more than twenty

companies involved in daily-fantasy sports, among them *Sports Illustrated* and *USA Today*. But the vast majority of the action—ninety-six per cent, according to the latest estimates—is concentrated on FanDuel and on its chief rival, DraftKings, which was founded in 2011, in Boston, by three sports-fan colleagues at Vistaprint, a direct-marketing company. Perhaps by now you’ve seen some of DraftKings’ TV spots, like the one involving yet another—in this case, fictional—Fantasy Sports Hall of Fame. “Former accountant Derek Bradley,” a would-be docent intones, while leading his tour group toward a clay statue of a scrawny man wearing glasses. “DraftKings one-day fantasy baseball took him from a guy with holes in his underpants to a guy with bikini models in them!”

Neither FanDuel nor DraftKings is currently profitable, although both are increasingly mentioned as possible “unicorns,” a term used by venture capitalists to refer to startups valued at a billion or more dollars on the basis of fund-raising alone. In the race to attract customers, both companies have been spending more money on radio and television commercials, and on the whopping prizes that those ads promise, than they’ve been taking in via the rake—a cut, around ten per cent or less, of all the user entry fees. Nonetheless, their combined revenues have increased by nearly twentyfold in the past two years, and ESPN is said to be close to acquiring a twenty-per-cent stake in DraftKings.

The phenomenon is going global, too. “We’re first-to-market in the U.K. and Europe,” a tall man named Daniel Feldman said. Feldman spent eleven years working for the Russian oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky and a year as a pitching coach for the Soviet national baseball team. He passed me a coupon for the fantasy platform Mondogol, advertising a daily “soccer for cash” game. “It’s a fucking landgrab,” he said.

When I questioned soccer’s fantasy potential, given its relative lack of scoring (fewer numbers to rearrange), he said, “We have a lot of stats”—passes completed and passes intercepted, for example, to say nothing of goals and assists. “And we can always add more. We can add clearances, corner kicks, shots off target, fouls that result in a penalty kick.”

He said that Mondogol had just signed a marketing deal with Barcelona, the team of Lionel Messi and Neymar. “Barcelona has eighty million Facebook fans”—a number that approaches the total of the entire N.F.L. Mondogol is based on the Isle of Man and has a license from the United Kingdom Gambling Commission. “The argument against us working is that if you go to Old Trafford or Wembley you can order bangers and mash in one window, and then you take one step to the right and you can bet on the game,” Feldman said. “But our counterargument is: It’s a developed betting culture. There’s no stigma attached. It’s social—they bet with friends. A certain portion of money is set aside for gambling, and there’s been no innovation in gambling there in twenty years. A whole new game can come in.”

Exactly what distinguishes a game of skill from a game of chance in this country is decided at the state level, and FanDuel and DraftKings currently prohibit residents of Arizona, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, and Washington from playing for money. A panel of the F.S.T.A. conference was devoted to discussing lobbying efforts in those remaining states, as well as praising the

“crown jewel,” UIGEA, and monitoring the national political scene, where the presumption seems to be that further Republican success could be bad for business. “One senator is all it takes,” an association member told me, noting that “there are a lot of conservative people who are against drinking, gambling, gay marriage.” Not that FanDuel, say, considers itself gambling, which, even if it were legal, might limit the platform’s populist appeal. But there are others who are clearly hoping that the growing popularity of daily fantasy can serve as a kind of stalking horse for outright sports betting, beyond Nevada.

Daily fantasy’s biggest ally among the major sports leagues is the highly regarded new N.B.A. commissioner, Adam Silver. Last November, Silver publicly committed his league to an equity stake in FanDuel: a strong demonstration of mainstream support. The next day, Silver published an Op-Ed in the *Times*, calling for something like the British model of legalizing and regulating sports betting. “Gambling has increasingly become a popular and accepted form of entertainment in the United States,” he wrote, and mentioned a high-end estimate of nearly four hundred billion dollars wagered illegally on sports each year. That figure would include most of your



“O.K., someone, anyone, press the button.”



"It's a woman."

office March Madness pools, which, unlike fantasy sports, do in fact hinge on the outcome of individual games. Taking this money into account, a sports-entertainment industry that is often said to be the only thing keeping cable television afloat turns out to be even more indomitable.

Silver calls himself a "realist," and implies that people who continue to believe that authentic sports fans merely root for the home team, with their eyes glued to the court, are in the grips of a different sort of fantasy, blinded from the thousands of people at any given game who already spend half the time staring at their phones—or at the Kiss Cam, or at the branded T-shirts launched from handheld cannons during every break in the action. We don't watch basketball games; we watch portions of them. They would like those portions to be slightly larger.

Silver's perspective helps explain what is perhaps the most surprising

development in all this: the enthusiasm of the once pious Major League Baseball, which entered into a marketing partnership with DraftKings almost two years ago, in the summer of 2013. "In today's world, we want a quicker reaction, a quicker culmination," Bob Bowman, M.L.B.'s president for business and media, told me, and cited the fact that daily fantasy skews young, which is appealing to league executives as they contemplate the implications of cord-cutting, second screens, and other industry-disrupting habits of so-called digital natives. This is especially pertinent for baseball, which has the oldest fan base of the major team sports and has recently been contending with pace-of-play issues, flirting with the introduction of a pitch clock and other measures to keep games from dragging on.

Bowman brought up a fantasy game that his department developed in 2001, called Beat the Streak, referring to Joe

DiMaggio's record, set in 1941, of fifty-six consecutive games with at least one base hit. On the league's Web site, you'd select a single batter from among the rosters scheduled to play each night. If he recorded a hit, your streak was activated. The next day, you'd choose again. The goal was to keep it going for fifty-seven days. Bowman suggested that it was, in a way, the progenitor of daily fantasy.

Beat the Streak was free to play, with a ten-thousand-dollar prize reserved for the first person to succeed. The prize went unclaimed. The following year, the game runners increased the prize to a hundred thousand dollars. In 2008, with no one yet having come closer than forty-nine days, they upped it to a million. A few years later, they introduced "mulligans": anyone who'd established a streak of between five and fifteen games was welcome to shrug off a mistaken bet and keep counting upward, with no consequences, like a duffer ignoring a tee shot sliced into the woods. They also added a "double down" feature, allowing contestants to select pairs of batters, in the hope of besting DiMaggio in half the time. In September of 2012, they went all in, announcing Beat the Streak in a Day, an option of picking fifty-seven batters at once. A streak in name only—but now more popular than ever. The prize, still unclaimed, stands at \$5.6 million.

"Baseball's a vexing game," Bowman said. "Whether because of Adam Silver's Op-Ed, which has certainly developed a lot of interest, or daily fantasy, we're all looking at a lot of things." M.L.B. commissioned an independent study to assess how skill-based daily fantasy is, and, last week, sufficiently reassured, it announced a multi-year extension of its deal with DraftKings.

If fantasy sports are an "accelerant" of fandom, as Adam Silver says, it may be only natural that the fantasy games have been accelerating. "We went from season-long to daily, and I figure the next step is in-game," a civil engineer named Dan Cook told me over breakfast at the Bellagio. "That's where it's obviously headed." He produced his iPhone and began to demonstrate his app, Fanamana (pronounced "phenomena"). "Our thing is you can't even start to play until after the first pitch," he said.

Fanamana's premise is that even daily fantasy is too passive a form of fan engagement, in the mobile era, and that waiting for statistics to accumulate can ultimately be of interest only to an analytically minded subset of the population. The app provides you with an "on-deck circle," a list of batters in the starting lineups of all the baseball games currently under way, and you select up to three of them, to create your own micro-lineup. As each batter comes up in the real games, his success or failure is applied to your virtual team on the app. A triple followed by a strikeout and then a walk leaves you with one out and runners on first and third. A strikeout followed by a walk and then a triple gives you a 1-0 lead. And so on—until three outs have ended your inning. Games last three, six, or nine innings, depending on your preference. No need to worry about pitchers.

Like several people I met in Las Vegas, Cook believed that Dan Okrent's initial concern about a weakening of ties between fans and their favorite teams was being borne out. We found ourselves reminiscing about the great Yankees-Red Sox rivalry of a decade ago, and how it was hard to imagine anything like that tribal intensity returning in the near future. But he proposed that a larger, almost utopian gain was being made, in the form of a perfectly optimized season. What he and the other entrepreneurs were doing, he said, was "aggregating live events and creating user-generated content." And with enough live-action games being spun off of the occasionally listless action on the field, and the introduction of money, where necessary, to raise the stakes, every pitch of every game would soon be of great consequence to some thousands of digital gamers, somewhere.

It just might not be obvious inside the stadium itself—which, I soon learned from a friend of Cook's, Jon Goldstein, was due for some rethinking anyway. Goldstein has invested in old movie theatres in and around Detroit, in an attempt to revive another disrupted business. The fan of the not too distant future, Goldstein said, will want better telecom service within the stadiums so that he can follow his fantasy teams at the same time as he is watching the game. "You'll have an iPad mounted into the seat, and

on that iPad you'll have the RedZone channel," he said. "Can you imagine? I pay, I can lean back, I can sit, and I can be in my living room—but in the stadium. That's what we're doing in the theatres."

What explains the temptation to make games of the watching of games? Last month, I joined Fantasy Iditarod, and the two or three hours that I spent compiling my team of Alaskan dog mushers were a nirvana of pure concentration. I had twenty-seven thousand "dollars" to spend on seven sled drivers, whose "salaries" were calibrated such that you couldn't just stock up on favorites and former champions. The process reminded me of something Dan Okrent said, when describing what he called the "one, overriding positive contribution" that Rotisserie baseball had made to the actual sport, which was that, after you started playing, "you knew the twenty-third guy on the roster of a team that you never followed—a reserve infielder on the Brewers, who has a face, and a personality, and who's doing something on a regular basis that you can track." And so it was that I came to learn about Chuck Schaeffer, a sixty-year-old Army veteran from Kotzebue, north of the Arctic Circle, who had twice before, more than twenty years ago, tried and failed to traverse the snowy thousand-mile trail and was now coming back for one final attempt. I scooped him up for a thousand bucks.

The gamification of fandom is alluring because it provides an application for the things you've learned—or think you've learned—in the course of wasting so much time that could have been spent reading Proust, or playing with your kids, or donating blood. It's a hedge against existential despair, a measurable opportunity to "succeed" at what might otherwise be called futility. I went to Alaska on assignment a couple of years ago, to see the Iditarod in person, and was sufficiently transfixed by the new sporting subculture that I've continued to follow its developments from afar. Yet nobody in my daily life, some eighteen hundred miles below the Arctic Circle, shares this interest or is likely to be impressed

by my gut sense that Nicolas Petit, from France, was a steal at four thousand dollars—as, indeed, he proved to be!

But it was a good thing I had no real money on the line. I went to bed, on the second night of the week-and-a-half-long race, in two-hundred-and-fifth place (out of around eleven hundred: not bad) and woke up in seven-hundred-and-third, with no hope of recovery. One of my costliest investments had been disqualified, the equivalent of a season-ending injury. My consumption of Iditarod-related media nose-dived in the days that followed. I no longer had a stake in Chuck Schaeffer's comeback ride and scarcely noticed when he finished. What I needed, clearly, was for FanDuel to add daily fantasy musing to its slate of options.

FanDuel and DraftKings sometimes host in-person events, for which people qualify online. Frequent players are able to match faces to screen names (3rd_and_schlong, for instance, turns out to be Bryce Mauro, a junior at DePauw University, in Indiana) while eating and drinking on the company dime and generally being treated like stars in their own right, rather than superfans. These events tend to have the biggest purses—in football, where the action is heaviest, a million or more for first prize is not uncommon—and to take place, like the F.S.T.A. conference, in Las Vegas. Or, in the case of a FanDuel basketball event held in Los Angeles on a Saturday night in February, at the Playboy Mansion.

The Playboy Basketball Championship generated considerable excitement within the industry, because the eventual winner, pmiles, was a working married mother. She offered hope for what is known as the "ecosystem" problem—too many sharks scaring away the fish—which presents a threat to rival any moralizing senator. As Dan Cook put it, "If I want to play tennis and Pete Sampras shows up, that's no fun."

Pam Miles, who is fifty-one, works in the accounting department of a small oil-field company outside Houston. "I'm a numbers person," she said when we spoke, shortly after she'd cashed FanDuel's hundred-thousand-dollar check, which she planned to spend on having "the pool redone" and on other home-improvement projects. She began playing daily fantasy

football last Thanksgiving, on the recommendation of the older of her two adult sons. Post-turkey, she created a FanDuel account and deposited a hundred dollars, which she hadn't had to re-up in the months since. She'd qualified for the basketball championship on the basis of her football prowess. "I haven't watched basketball in years," she said, because it's "too demanding on your time," in contrast with football's manageable Sunday-afternoon concentration. "There's so many games, and they're late at night."

She crammed for three weeks, learning the difference between a center and a power forward, and ultimately produced a ten-inch stack of research papers. Her primary strategy was to avoid picking superstars, because of the risk that they might wind up resting on the bench in the event of a runaway victory. She saw her indifference to the sport as an advantage. "In football, I avoid every player from the Dallas Cowboys, because I really don't like them," she said. "But in basketball I don't have any favorites, so it's easy not to have any biases."

Championship qualifiers were entitled to plus-ones, so Miles brought her husband of thirty-five years, an auto mechanic who enjoys sports on a nonstatistical level. While they were being bused from their hotel to the mansion, she received a text from her son, recommending that she sub in Anthony Davis, the New Orleans Pelicans star, who was on an apparent hot streak. She balked. "I got lucky," she said, and hesitated, before adding, "Maybe I shouldn't use that word. It was *intuition*." Davis hurt his shoulder in the first half of the Pelicans-Bulls game and never returned, dooming more than half of the seventy Playboy entrants, Muntradamus among them.

Miles was hovering in the top ten for much of the evening. She surged to the top when the Mavericks-Trailblazers game went into overtime and a couple of midlist Mavericks she'd selected, Monta Ellis and Chandler Parsons, suddenly morphed into Jordan and Pippen, scoring thirteen of the team's fifteen points. Here, it seemed, was the kind of thrill-inducing drama that Nigel Eccles has in mind when he talks about changing the way we consume sports. If only Miles had been paying attention. "I didn't watch any of the sports that night," she

said. The stakes were too great, and the fluctuating prospects were too tense to bear. "I didn't want that roller coaster."

The highlight of the F.S.T.A. conference was the elevator-pitch competition, in which two dozen entrepreneurs were allotted three minutes each to impress their colleagues with their visions of the fantasy future. Nigel Eccles had won in 2009, I kept hearing. Dan Cook's Fanamana had won in 2013. Some of the new presentations were more modest in scope, focussing on streamlining the path between a swipe of your thumb and a swelling of your bank balance, and it dawned on me that fantasy sports have followed much the same trajectory as online dating, beginning with an attempt to simulate something complex and building toward a simpler and more immediate payoff. "Envision what it would be like to spend more time with family and friends," said the proprietor of Fantasy Sports Edge, an app that automatically replaces injured players in your lineup with the best available alternatives, sparing you the trouble of scouring the wires for breaking medical news. Or, better yet: "Let us do the research and you do the winning." So said Travis Spieth, the founder of Fantasy Picks, and the first FanDuel user ever to win a million dollars. "Our slogan is 'Win in ten,'" Spieth explained. "You can see our lineups in less than ten seconds, and if you spend longer than ten minutes on our Web site in a day you've spent too much."

A more provocative entry came from Alexandria Bolton and Joe Hicks, of Million Dollar Fantasy Sports—a reference to the cost of participating. "We're looking for thirty-two affluent team owners," Hicks said. "Or maybe you're a fantasy wizard with a wealthy uncle who would want to stake you." They described a hedge fund, with plans to invest in distressed real estate, oil and gas, and "other low-risk, high-return opportunities," as Hicks put it. The brilliant gimmick was that the fund would be seeded by people playing fantasy football, for cash prizes that would come from the annual returns. As a distillation of contemporary sports-fan aspirations, this seemed a fitting progression. Dan Okrent, having long since abandoned the dream of suiting up for the Tigers, had imagined how he might have served as their general manager. A

quarter century later, via the Moneyball revolution, people not unlike Okrent were actually becoming G.M.s. And now that fantasy sports themselves were awash in money it stood to reason that their participants might see themselves as future Mark Cubans, not Theo Epstein's. Also, Million Dollar Fantasy Sports was, oddly, truer to real life. "Even if you finish in dead last, you can still make a great return on your investment," Bolton said. Hicks later suggested to me that, with the returns they hoped for, you could pocket two hundred grand just for playing—just for membership in the elite club of owners. (They have since abandoned the project.)

My personal rooting interest was in Muntradamus. Munter told me that he'd hoped to find an outlet for blending the creative and the analytical sides of his personality. He called his game Beast Franchise, and he spent the weekend practicing his pitch on anyone within range. At the FanDuel party, I'd seen him plead with one of the company's employees for a shot—it'd be his third, evidently—at pitching Nigel Eccles directly. From across the ballroom, during breaks, I'd see him pacing and gesticulating, sometimes to no one in particular. His idea was almost retro, in its emphasis on the role of the manager in setting a batting order, rather than on efficient roster construction. No salary cap. Just choose the best lineup you can think of. The order holds your fate.

"What's beautiful about Beast Franchise is that no two Matt Hollidays are the same," Munter said, using the St. Louis Cardinals slugger as an example. "Also, every at-bat is epic!" He proposed a scenario in which your leadoff batter is playing on Pacific Coast time, while Matt Holliday, your second batter, is playing out east. Holliday hits a home run, and now you have to wait a couple of hours to see whether, for your purposes, it'll count as a solo shot or a two-run blast. It was the kind of inspired idea that might occur only to someone whose daily routine involves watching games through a progression of time zones, in search of continuous engagement.

Alas, Beast Franchise was voted runner-up, defeated by Celebrity Fantasy Draft, "the fantasy game for those people who would rather watch E! than ESPN." Even the most avid sports fans need a break sometimes. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

CHILD SPA

BY PAUL RUDNICK

The spa industry has begun to target children in a big way. . . . “I feel like the best princess in the world,” said Paige, who celebrated her seventh birthday at Sweet and Sassy, a national chain of spas that boasts that its cosmetologists are specially trained to work with children.

—*The Times*.

Poor Paige. Doesn't she know? She's seven. It's over. And I know you're thinking, But, Ava, you're only five. To which I'd reply, “Exactly. I'm not four

ror, and I think, Where's that pre-K glow? Is it true that once you haul yourself up by the corner of a coffee table and learn to walk the effort leaves you permanently haggard? I wish I'd never started talking, because I'm developing those nasolabial creases around my mouth. It's like my best friend, Skyler, always says: “Talking is the new smoking.” Last week, I looked at my six-month-old brother Kaden and I

Monday, Skyler and I spent the whole day there. First, we did TotSpin on stationary tricycles, while Shar, our instructor, kept yelling, “Move it, little ladies! Nobody likes a wobbly toddler! Wading-pool season is coming up!” Then we did an hour of Princess Yoga, where the poses include Leaving the Limo, Twirling the Tiara, and Pitying Camilla. Skyler and I were both wearing outfits from Shar's new line of workout gear, called Child Support, but I got a little jealous because Skyler's parents just bought her Riley, the latest American Girl doll. Riley is from the nineteen-nineties, back when little girls wanted graduate degrees and careers. Riley's accessories include shoulder pads, an attaché case, and a really big phone that never rings.

After our Moroccan thermal espresso-mud wraps and detoxifying wild-lime silk-oil treatments, Skyler and I were feeling toned, poreless, and ready to attract the right kind of little boys. “I like Decker Mellowitz,” Skyler confided, “because his dad has a hedge fund, his mom is working on a tele-transportation startup, and he can wipe himself.” “But have you seen Mason Drays?” I asked. “Last week, he sold a series to Amazon about this pack of six-year-olds who just hang out and play video games and refuse to grow up; plus, he's working on a memoir about how, after his nanny made him wear an itchy scarf, he got her deported.” I looked up from my chaise, and noticed that Kate Middleton was on the video monitor. “Does she count as a real princess?” Skyler asked. “I mean, she's old, her parents are commoners, and her hair can be so flat and brown. She's like if the Fairy Godmother waved her wand and whooshed Cinderella into a wool coatdress and a sensible heel. She's like Cinderella going on a job interview.”

Sometimes I tell myself, Ava, this year is going to be awesome. Maybe five really *is* the new three. You're a pretty little girl, your nose still hasn't really made up its mind, and they're making major inroads in preteen cheekbone implants. And then I look in the mirror and there they are. Why me? My life is garbage. I can't even say the word. So I'm going to whisper it and beg God to make them go away: “Freckles.” ♦



any more.” When you're four, you can get away with a few extra pounds, and your friends will just whisper, “It's baby fat—let's call it that.” Or “Maybe she'll grow out of it. Unlike her mom.” Or “Maybe it's a thyroid thing. Fingers crossed!” But once you hit five they're all, “O.M.G., who's that fat girl who ate Ava?” And “Is Ava really depressed? Because she should be.” Or “Maybe Ava had to gain the weight for a movie role—as a community center.”

And it's not just about weight. Some mornings I wake up, I look in the mir-

thought, He used to be so adorable, before that first tooth. Teeth are a dead giveaway, because they're like a neon sign reading: “UH-OH, HERE COMES SOLID FOOD.” My parents caught me giving Kaden a volcanic-pumice exfoliating facial to see if I could make him look more like his ultrasound, but my mom just sighed and said, “It's too late.”

That's why, every chance I get, I hit Little Miss Lovely, our local child spa. I've decided that, this year, I'm finally going to get in shape. Last

LETTER FROM OKLAHOMA

WEATHER UNDERGROUND

The arrival of man-made earthquakes.

BY RIVKA GALCHEN



In the fall of 2011, students in Katie Keranen's seismology course at the University of Oklahoma buried portable seismograph stations around the campus, in anticipation of a football game between the Sooners and the Texas A. & M. Aggies. The plan was to see if the students could, by reading the instruments, detect the rumble of eighty-two thousand fans cheering for a touchdown. "To see if they can figure out if a signal is a passing train or a cheering crowd—that's much more interesting for them than discussing data in theory," Keranen, an assistant professor of geophysics, told me.

But at 2:12 A.M. on November 5th,

the day of the game, people in seventeen states felt an earthquake of 4.8 magnitude, centered near Prague, Oklahoma, a town of roughly twenty-five hundred, which is about an hour's drive from Norman, where O.U. is situated. The students quickly packed up the seismographs and headed to Prague, hoping to measure the aftershocks. "Obviously, this was more worthwhile than a game," Keranen said.

Outside homes around Prague and nearby Meeker, Keranen and her students, along with Austin Holland, the head seismologist of the Oklahoma Geological Survey, buried their equipment. Portable seismographs look like

mini-kegs, or time capsules, and they need to be placed underground and on a level. The researchers wanted to install them quickly, since the ground was still shaking.

Shortly before 11 P.M., people in Prague heard what sounded like a jet plane crashing. It was another earthquake, this time a 5.6, followed, two days later, by a 4.7. (The earthquake scale is logarithmic, so a 5.0 earthquake shakes the ground ten times more than a 4.0, and a hundred times more than a 3.0.) No one was killed, but at least sixteen houses were destroyed and a spire on the historic Benedictine Hall at St. Gregory's University, in nearby Shawnee, collapsed. Very few people had earthquake insurance; the five million dollars needed for the repairs at St. Gregory's was raised through crowdfunding.

The earthquakes were big news, but the victory of the Sooners—the name comes from the term for those who broke the rules of the 1889 land run and staked claims in advance—was followed more closely. Few noticed that Keranen and her team had gathered likely the best data we have on a new phenomenon in Oklahoma: man-made earthquakes.

At the time, earthquakes were a relatively rare event for Oklahomans. Now they're reported on daily, like the weather, and generally by the weatherman. Driving outside Oklahoma City one evening last November, I ended up stopped in traffic next to an electronic billboard that displayed, in rotation, an advertisement for one per cent cash back at the Thunderbird Casino, an advertisement for a Cash N Gold pawnshop, a three-day weather forecast, and an announcement of a 3.0 earthquake, in Noble County. Driving by the next evening, I saw that the display was the same, except that the earthquake was a 3.4, near Pawnee.

Until 2008, Oklahoma experienced an average of one to two earthquakes of 3.0 magnitude or greater each year. (Magnitude-3.0 earthquakes tend to be felt, while smaller earthquakes may be noticed only by scientific equipment or by people close to the epicenter.) In 2009, there were twenty. The next year, there were forty-two. In 2014, there were five hundred and eighty-five, nearly triple the rate of California. Including smaller earthquakes in the count, there were more

The increased seismicity is likely due to changes in the way oil and gas are produced.

than five thousand. This year, there has been an average of two earthquakes a day of magnitude 3.0 or greater.

William Ellsworth, a research geologist at the United States Geological Survey, told me, "We can say with virtual certainty that the increased seismicity in Oklahoma has to do with recent changes in the way that oil and gas are being produced." Many of the larger earthquakes are caused by disposal wells, where the billions of barrels of brackish water brought up by drilling for oil and gas are pumped back into the ground. (Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking—in which chemically treated water is injected into the earth to fracture rocks in order to access oil and gas reserves—causes smaller earthquakes, almost always less than 3.0.) Disposal wells trigger earthquakes when they are dug too deep, near or into basement rock, or when the wells impinge on a fault line. Ellsworth said, "Scientifically, it's really quite clear."

The first case of earthquakes caused by fluid injection came in the nineteen-sixties. Engineers at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, a chemical-weapons manufacturing center near Commerce City, Colorado, disposed of waste fluids by injecting them down a twelve-thousand-foot well. More than a thousand earthquakes resulted, several of magnitudes close to 5.0. "Unintentionally, it was a great experiment," Justin Rubinstein, who researches induced seismicity for the U.S.G.S., told me.

In recent years, other states with oil and gas exploration have also seen an unusual number of earthquakes. State authorities quickly suspected that the earthquakes were linked to disposal wells. In Youngstown, Ohio, in 2011, after dozens of smaller quakes culminated in a 4.0, a nearby disposal well was shut down, and the earthquakes stopped. Around the same time, in Arkansas, a series of earthquakes associated with four disposal wells in the Fayetteville Shale led to a ban on disposal wells near related faults. Earthquakes were also noted in Colorado, Kansas, and Texas. There, too, relevant disposal wells were shut down or the volume of fluid injected was reduced and the earthquakes abated.

But in Oklahoma, which has had more and stronger earthquakes than the other

states, it was late 2013 before an owner of a disposal well was asked by the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, which regulates oil and gas exploration, to temporarily reduce its operations—and that was because the well operator himself contacted the O.C.C. and the O.G.S., asking them to look into whether his well was causing problems. So far, there have been only eleven instances in which an owner has, by order, stopped injecting fluids or repositioned a well that was drilled into basement rock.

Driving through Oklahoma's countryside, you see starlings and cows and nodding donkeys—also known as pumpjacks—and hundreds of disposal wells, of which there are around thirty-two hundred in the state. Disposal wells are generally simple structures: there may be trucks full of water parked nearby, and a typical wellhead is little more than a tank connected to a pump, with some knobs and a few meters visible. "You would be underwhelmed by the technology," a well-operations engineer told me.

An area of oil and gas exploration is said to be "played out" when it no longer yields sufficient profits, and much of Oklahoma was considered to have been played out in the nineteen-nineties. One problem was the immense quantity of wastewater that was being brought up along with the diminishing yield of oil. "In the past, these wells that brought up so much water were abandoned," Holland, of the O.G.S., told me. "They didn't make economic sense. But then a new strategy came along, which was, basically, Let's just pull up a lot of water." Dewatering technologies and the rising price of oil made Oklahoma a rich business proposition again.

Although disposal wells have been used for decades, the new dewatering process has led to a dramatic increase in how much water is being disposed of. (In the state, the water used in the initial stage of fracking accounts for less than ten per cent of the water pumped down disposal wells.) In Oklahoma today, an average of about ten barrels of water comes up for every barrel of oil. Holland said, "We're talking about billions of barrels, and it has to go somewhere." Todd Hulihan, a professor of geology at Oklahoma State University, in Stillwater, told me, "We're injecting the equivalent of two Lake Hefners"—Oklahoma City's

four-square-mile reservoir—"into the ground each year, and we don't really understand where that water is going."

Austin Holland, who is forty, joined the Oklahoma Geological Survey in 2010, shortly after the occurrence of what is called the "Jones swarm"—seventy-five earthquakes felt in one county, around the town of Jones, in little more than a year. He said, "When I first came here, there were swarms, and I thought we were beginning to understand them, but I would say now—with the increasing rates of seismicity—I'd say all bets are off."

I met Holland last November, at a conference on induced seismicity organized by the O.G.S. and the U.S.G.S. and held in Midwest City, which is between Norman and Oklahoma City, the academic and industry centers of Oklahoma, respectively. Holland grew up in a number of Western states; his mother worked as an accountant and his father as a librarian and a Methodist minister.

On the first day of the conference, a few dozen people were gathered in a small room at the Sheraton: mostly scientists, but also oil and gas representatives, insurance representatives, and civil engineers. A bus tour of a local disposal well was cancelled, owing to icy roads. "I'll give you the dog and pony show that I was going to give on the bus, and then I'll answer questions and we'll have a few beers," Holland said.

The official position of the O.G.S. is that the Prague earthquakes were likely a natural event and that there is insufficient evidence to say that most earthquakes in Oklahoma are the result of disposal wells. That position, however, has no published research to support it, and there are at least twenty-three peer-reviewed, published papers that conclude otherwise.

When I spoke to Holland, I had the impression of a man who loved science and was politely trying to endure waking up each day, after insufficient sleep, to discover himself in the role of a politician. At the conference, someone asked Holland about several earthquakes of greater than 4.0 magnitude which had occurred a few days earlier, across Oklahoma's northern border, in Kansas. Holland joked, "Well, the earthquakes aren't stopping at the state line, but my problems

do.” There was a follow-up question: Why had there previously been no quakes in Kansas—and now for a year and a half there have been so many?

As the question was asked, a couple of men wandered into the back of the room, where trays of beer and soda were set up. Holland called out, “Well, Justin, what do you think of that question?”

The U.S.G.S.’s Justin Rubinstein, one of the three organizers of the conference, said, “Um, well, if you map the fluid-injection records and the earthquake records—there you go.” There was a pause. “I didn’t even know this meeting was happening—I thought it was cancelled. I just came down here to get a drink.”

Holland said, “Well, you heard it from him, not me.” Soon afterward, he concluded, “I think I’m done sitting here in front of you all. Let’s relax and continue talking over beers.” Holland had been clear about the connections between disposal wells and earthquakes, and during the socializing a researcher from Princeton observed that Holland’s position seemed to have shifted from that represented in O.G.S. statements. “Let me think how I can answer that while there’s a reporter standing right there,” Holland said, lightly. “The O.G.S. is a nonacademic department of a state university that, like many state universities, doesn’t get that much funding from the state.” The O.G.S. is part of O.U.’s Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy, which also includes the ConocoPhillips School of Geology and Geophysics. About seventeen per cent of O.U.’s budget comes from the state. “I prepare twenty pages for those statements and what comes out is one page. Those are not necessarily my words.”

The first oil discovered in Oklahoma was found accidentally, in 1859, in a well drilled to find salt, near present-day Salina; the oil was sold as fuel for lamps. As related in “Oklahoma Oil: Past, Present, and Future,” by Dan Boyd, the next find came in 1889, near Chelsea, where a well produced half a barrel of oil per day; it was used to treat cattle for ticks. Then, in 1897, a well drilled near Bartlesville became a major oil producer, and many others followed. Within ten years, Oklahoma was producing more oil than anywhere else in the world. Not coincidentally, in 1907, Oklahoma went from being a territory to being the forty-sixth

state. The state constitution includes a legal definition of kerosene.

I was brought up in Norman, where my father was a professor of meteorology in the college of geosciences at O.U. Although I had a happy childhood in Oklahoma, I grew up thinking of the state as an unlucky one, not so much because of, say, the Dust Bowl, but because of what I saw around me. One neighbor went bankrupt; another, a Mormon family of thirteen, had to move out of their barely furnished Tudor-style home and into a small trailer; another neighbor had a series of brain surgeries to help with damage from an infancy with an alcoholic parent who shook her. We had moved to Oklahoma shortly after the millions of dollars made following the 1979 oil crisis had begun to evaporate. In elementary school, I knew what “foreclosure” meant. When many local banks closed down after the savings-and-loan scandal, I had a sweatshirt, popular at the time, that had within the outlines of the state the words “I Bank at F.D.I.C.”

Because I was a kid, the landscape of economic and moral reversals around me seemed like hailstorms or flash floods, which, although both my parents worked in weather-related jobs, I thought of as messages from the capricious but still venerable guy above. When I first began reading about the earthquakes in Oklahoma, even as I read that they might be linked to the oil and gas industry, the exact words that came to my mind were the handily ambiguous “That’s natural.”

Oklahoma is an oil state. Which is not to say that it is a wealthy state. Twenty-four per cent of Oklahoman children live in poverty. It is ranked forty-sixth in over-all health, a measurement that considers such factors as access to medical care and the affordability of that care. In 2013, a boom oil year, it was among the states that spent the least per student, and ranked No. 1 in cutting funding to education.

Oil has brought money to the state, but mostly to a few individuals. The state budget in Oklahoma in 2014 was seven billion dollars; the net worth that year of Harold Hamm, the thirteenth child of a sharecropper from Enid, who heads the oil company Continental Resources, was twice that.

A statistic from the Oklahoma En-

ergy Resources Board that is often cited by politicians is that one in every five jobs in Oklahoma is directly or indirectly related to the oil and gas industry. (“Directly” accounts for only five per cent of the jobs.) But by psychological accounting oil and gas can seem like the whole world. The names of the oil and gas barons—Boone Pickens, Lloyd Noble, Sarkeys J. Sarkeys—are the names of nearly everything: the concert hall, the diabetes center, the aquarium, the football stadium. These “wildcatters” often have compelling rags-to-riches stories, and their eccentricities make for a kind of local Kardashian show. When Harold Hamm and his wife, a former executive of his company, were divorcing, the local press reported on a handwritten, nine-hundred-and-seventy-five-million-dollar check he wrote her. A man I know was with his daughter, shopping for a prom dress, when they ran into David Chernicky, the beloved head of the energy company New Dominion—“What a sweetheart he is!” the O.G.S. secretary said to me, apropos of almost nothing—and Chernicky insisted on paying for the dress and the shoes; he wouldn’t take no for an answer.

New Dominion’s main field office is in Prague, and many residents are reluctant to speak about the damage caused by the earthquakes there. A local, who didn’t want to be named, told me, “I know it sounds crazy, but I know people whose homes were levelled, and they won’t say anything.”

For decades, Prague has celebrated the Kolache Festival each spring, commemorating the town’s Czech heritage. It’s now preceded by the New Dominion Dayz, a sponsored fair that raises money for scholarships for graduating high-school seniors.

In state government, oil money is both invisible and pervasive. In 2013, Mary Fallin, the governor, combined the positions of Secretary of Energy and Secretary of the Environment. Michael Teague, whom she appointed to the position, when asked by the local NPR reporter Joe Wertz whether he believed in climate change, responded that he believed that the climate changed every day. Of the earthquakes, Teague has said that we need to learn more. Fallin’s first substantive response came in 2014, when

she encouraged Oklahomans to buy earthquake insurance. (However, many earthquake-insurance policies in the state exclude coverage for induced earthquakes.)

That year, Fallin convened the Coordinating Council on Seismicity Activity, with Teague as its head. The council has no power to enact rules. It met only twice last year, and the second meeting was held at the same time as the conference on induced seismicity, in Midwest City, thus precluding the attendance of most experts. The council met for a third time this February, but the meeting, like all the previous ones, was closed to the press.

In September, 2014, at the request of two state representatives, the Oklahoma legislature conducted an official interim study on induced seismicity. In subsequent hearings, more than five hours of testimony were presented to a committee of legislators. Holland, Dana Murphy, of the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, and Todd Halihan, the professor of geology at Oklahoma State University, all spoke about the link between disposal wells and earthquakes. Tim Baker, of the O.C.C., spoke about the link between drilling into basement rock and earthquakes.

After the hearings, Mark McBride, the committee chair, issued a press release. It denied “a correlation between the injection wells and seismic activity,” and quoted a legislator’s speculation that perhaps the quakes were caused by “the current drought.” None of the scientists who had been present were quoted. I called McBride, who at first had no memory of the study—nor did his secretary. Then McBride remembered it. I asked what he had learned from it, and he said, “Well, one question I had for them was about the drought. That maybe the drought is causing these problems. And I seem to remember that sometimes there’s a problem, if they drill down too far. But that’s about it, really.”

Between 2009 and 2014, no legislation related to earthquakes was even proposed by the state legislature. I asked Representative Jason Murphey, one of the legislators who had called for the interim study—after a town-hall meeting in his district was filled with seven hundred and fifty angry and scared residents—whether he felt that the legislature should respond to the quakes. He said, “I think the most important thing

that the legislature can do is to insure that government regulation doesn’t get in the way of technologies of wastewater being disposed of by other means.” The main technology for aboveground treatment of wastewater is a device called the Koch membrane, developed by Koch Industries; it filters out most toxins, though it is considered quite expensive, and can handle only limited volume.

In the 2015 legislative session, the other state representative who had convened the interim study, Cory Williams, of Stillwater, has introduced two earthquake-related bills. One proposes tax breaks for aboveground water-treatment technologies; the other seeks to make earthquake insurance more fair to consumers. At least eight bills have been proposed that aim to make it difficult for communities to set their own rules for oil drilling.

Some people argue that the legislature and the governor are ill-equipped to address the issue of earthquakes, and that the Oklahoma Corporation Commission is far more powerful. The O.C.C. has three elected commissioners, with extensive campaign platforms, but not one cites earthquakes as an issue. The most recently elected commissioner, Todd Hiett, listed on his campaign Web site nine issues as priorities, including the fight against “Obama phones”—subsidized cell phones for poor people.

Which is not to say that the O.C.C.

does not hear from the public about earthquakes. “This is our No. 1 priority,” Matt Skinner, a spokesman for the O.C.C., told me. “We are thinking about this every day, we are working on this every day, and we ourselves—some of us—live in earthquake-prone places. Our houses are shaking, too.”

Yet the O.C.C. has never denied a permit for a disposal well on the ground of seismicity. Skinner said that this is because people ask the commission if a permit is likely to be granted before they apply for it. “I would estimate that we have told about ten folks in this way, informally, that their permit is unlikely to pass,” he said. In total, there has been one fine related to seismicity, for five hundred dollars. “As of yet, we haven’t needed fines to have compliance,” the O.C.C. commissioner Dana Murphy told me. “The amount of collaboration and cooperation we have had around this issue has been tremendous, like nothing I’ve ever seen.”

Last September, the O.C.C., in consultation with the O.G.S., developed a set of best practices, asking for data from disposal wells within a ten-kilometre radius of earthquakes of magnitude 4.0 or greater, but the data have not always been timely, and the owners of only a handful of wells have subsequently been asked to reduce or cease operations. The radius is, in any case, an arbitrary one; studies





"I can't believe he brought her."

suggest that a larger radius would be more appropriate.

There remains no rule against drilling into basement rock. "It was never specifically allowed, and it was never specifically forbidden," Skinner explained. The O.C.C. has passed its first rules relating to seismicity within the past six months. One requires well operators to keep track of daily volumes and pressures; another requires an annual well inspection. A third rule proposed will simply require that the O.C.C. be notified when a well goes into use. "Keeping things as best practices rather than rules allows the staff to respond more quickly to the situation," Skinner said. "Rules take time, and are difficult to change."

Last summer, the O.C.C. asked New Dominion to provide evidence that four wells were not drilled into basement rock. The O.C.C. said that it was not satisfied with the evidence presented; it has requested further information, but it has yet to ask that the wells, which scientists have linked to twenty per cent of Oklahoma's seismic activity, reduce their volumes of disposal.

On the second day of the induced-seismicity conference, there was an industry panel scheduled, but, at the last minute, most of the participants cancelled, and the event was called off. Al-

most no one in the industry agreed to speak on the record about the earthquakes.

Yet some individuals acknowledge the problem. After Holland's talk, a well-operations engineer said to him, of the O.C.C.'s best-practices guidelines, which went into effect in the fall of 2014, "Look, I'm not speaking for my company, I'm just speaking as myself, but I'm surprised that the O.C.C. didn't ask for more." He continued, "We have so much information."

The engineer taught me a lot about enhanced oil-recovery techniques, disposal wells, 3-D seismic-imaging data, and core sampling. I asked him how he ended up in petroleum engineering, and he said that he was from Texas, where men either become football players or cowboys or they go into oil and gas. "If you're short like me, and good at math and science, then you go into oil and gas," he said. I asked him if I could use his name and he said, nicely, "Of course you can't!"

A couple of days after the conference, I travelled to Stillwater, to O.S.U.'s Boone Pickens School of Geology, to meet with Todd Halihan, the geology professor. The town's low redbrick buildings and cracked pavement give the impression of a hastily put-together Western town, but the O.S.U. campus, with its well-tended lawns and fountains, resembles an American Versailles. In the past year, Stillwater has had

more than a thousand earthquakes. Halihan, one of the few experts in the state to speak openly about the earthquakes' relation to oil and gas practices, has become the go-to guy for communicating to the public the science behind seismicity.

"I already have two jobs—I'm a full-time professor and I do consulting," Halihan said. "I don't really have time to do this, but I felt it's part of my job, because, in a sense, I work for the state. For so long, it was as if the earthquakes weren't happening."

The lobby of the Lloyd Noble Research Center is decorated with rose-colored plaques commemorating donors; the largest plaques honor Devon Energy and the billionaire alumnus Boone Pickens. Halihan's office is on the second floor, and a sign outside reads "Age and treachery always overcome youth and skills." Like most scientists I talked to, Halihan does not believe that there should be a moratorium on disposal wells or fracking; he just thinks that there should be open discussion, and a rational plan to avoid triggering the earthquakes that are felt in Stillwater almost daily.

A milk bottle filled with what looked like gravel was on his desk. "That's from the Arbuckle," he said, a geological formation under Oklahoma. Like most geologists, Halihan has experience in the oil and gas industry. He feels that the business is, in its way, a naturally honest one: "They make deals on a handshake—you have to have a good reputation or no one will work with you."

He went on, "We know more about the East African Rift than we know about the faults in the basement in Oklahoma." In seismically quiet places, such as the Midwest, which are distant from the well-known fault lines between tectonic plates, most faults are, instead, cracks within a plate, which are only discovered after an earthquake is triggered. The O.G.S.'s Austin Holland has long had plans to put together two updated fault maps, one using the available published literature on Oklahoma's faults and another relying on data that, it was hoped, the industry would volunteer; but, to date, no updated maps have been released to the public.

Halihan said, "As scientists, we *knew* the Dust Bowl was going to happen; it wasn't a surprise. It could have been prevented, but scientists failed to effectively communicate what they knew to the

people. I don't want that to happen again."

According to the Gutenberg-Richter Relation, a series of small earthquakes suggests that a larger one may take place in the same area. Ten 2.0s suggest that there may be a 3.0. Ten 3.0s suggest that there may be a 4.0. Recently, a 4.2 and a 4.0 and about a dozen smaller quakes shook Cushing, Oklahoma, a town of several thousand people that is known as the Pipeline Crossroads of the World; fifty-four million barrels of oil are stored there underground. A well near Cushing had been drilled into the bedrock. "Is that a bad place for an earthquake to occur?" Halihan said. "You bet it is."

In Stillwater, Angela Spotts took me on a drive along dirt roads outside the city, amid a landscape of scrub brush with little blue-headed roadrunners skipping past the black pipes that bring water to oil and gas exploration sites; the formation underground is called the Mississippi Lime Play. "See, that's American Energy-Woodford, they've been painting their wells with those red and blue stripes to look so cheerful," Spotts said. A year ago, with five others, she founded Stop Fracking Payne County. She is concerned about the earthquakes and also about other health and environmental problems associated with fracking. "I only own a few acres, and I don't own my mineral rights," she said. "I am learning that they can just come on your land and put a well right there."

Spotts is one of a number of Oklahomans acting as gadflies to the state. "We go all the way to testify to the legislature, and then they still tell us it isn't happening," she said. She knows all the major studies that link disposal wells to seismicity, and she can name the authors. "I would say I spend about two-thirds of my day just learning about this—it has taken over my life," she said. The activists' fluent knowledge and ready evidence can, perversely, make them sound crazy—so much data!—if one forgets that they are being continually, from all corners, gaslit. "At least with tobacco, you could choose not to smoke it, but here in Oklahoma—I mean, how could I choose not to live here?" Spotts said.

Like Spotts, Robert Jackman, a petroleum geologist, regularly contacts members of the U.S.G.S., the O.G.S., and the Oklahoma media to update them

on the accumulating peer-reviewed work that links disposal wells to seismicity. The oft-heard refrain that more studies are needed is a sore point for Jackman. "We know a cold is spread with sneezing and coughing, so we cover our nose and mouth, we wash our hands, we take precautions," he said. "We don't need to know exactly what the strain of virus is or all the technicalities of how the throat becomes inflamed in order to know to use a handkerchief."

Earl Hatley, a Cherokee, has been working for decades on environmental issues, particularly water pollution. He has master's degrees in both environmental and political science, and he was instrumental in raising awareness about the Tar Creek area—an expanse of abandoned lead and zinc mines that was named a Superfund site in 1983.

Hatley has been speaking with the O.C.C. about the earthquakes in the Stillwater area since November, 2013. He told me, "We had two hundred and twenty-two earthquakes reported as felt that year, and I said something should be done, and the O.C.C. basically said to me, 'Go away, what's your problem, that's no big deal, and there's no way you can link earthquakes to disposal wells, you're just crazy.' They said this even though in 2011 the U.S.G.S. was already reporting they were caused by disposal wells. The U.S.G.S. doesn't just say things; they're nearly as reliable as NASA."

Devon Energy, one of the largest oil companies in the area, has threatened Hatley with legal action if he doesn't allow it to drill on his land. "I don't own the mineral rights," he explained. "There was one family who owned the rights to the whole township, and I could never get them to sell to me." In the nineteen-eighties, representatives of an oil company tried to come onto his property to do a seismic survey, which would have told them how likely they were to find oil. "But the rule back then was that I could keep them off my property," Hatley said. More recently, people from Devon Energy approached him. "I told them no. I was sure I had the rule on my side. But I went to look up the rule and I discovered that the rule had changed. Now

they *were* allowed to come on my property without a seismic survey. I went down to Payne County to see when that rule change had happened. It happened fairly recently." (Devon Energy says that it has no further plans to drill in Payne County.)

Dea Mandevill, the city manager for Medford, a small town not far from Cushing, has been trying to draw attention to the hazard that the daily earthquakes pose to her town's aquifer and to the oil pipelines that run underground. "The industry has been really good for us," she said. "There's a use tax for any equipment brought in from another state, and also the leases for drilling. Not now, but in past years it's tripled our revenues. From the revenue to the county, we've bought a new pumper truck for our fire department, two new brush rigs, two ambulances." She continued, "We want to be a good partner for the oil companies—it's exciting for us that they're here. But if they can move the disposal well even just three miles, what a difference that would make."

Two weeks ago, a town-hall meeting was held in Medford. Austin Holland handed out earthquake-preparedness pamphlets, and representatives of the O.C.C. spoke about their intention to develop better maps and to ask for data from a larger number of wells. But there remains no directive to reduce the volume of fluid disposed of in wells in the Medford area, as was done fifteen miles north, in Kansas.

The day of the meeting, the O.C.C. announced that it had requested that

ninety-two companies provide proof that they had not drilled too close to basement rock. It's an important step, yet the O.C.C. has at other times claimed that it already has this information, from routine inspections, though it has not acted on it, owing to being

understaffed. The same day, the governor's office announced its biggest response to the earthquakes to date: allotting an additional fifty thousand dollars to the O.C.C.

Some argue that it is a deeply ingrained ethos of Oklahomans to consider freedom from regulation the most important kind of freedom. A century ago, though, Oklahoma had one of the strongest populist and socialist parties in the



nation, and in areas other than oil and gas the state has tight regulations. Recently, solar panels became subject to an additional tax. The rationale is that when the panels contribute unused energy to the grid they are using the infrastructure. The fact that money buys policy is well documented, and much of the money in Oklahoma is oil money. The wishes and inclinations of the majority of Oklahomans, by contrast, are difficult to discern.

From the data gathered by her graduate students, Katie Keranen published three papers, one in *Geology* and two in *Science*. They showed how four disposal wells were likely responsible for twenty per cent of the earthquakes in Oklahoma, and models made by a Ph.D. student, Matthew Weingarten, demonstrated that earthquakes could be triggered as far as thirty-five miles from the wells. When Keranen's first paper came out, she was still at the University of Oklahoma, where the geology department and the O.G.S. share a building. (Keranen has since left her position at O.U., and is now at Cornell.) But the O.G.S. made, and continues to make, no mention of Keranen's research on its Web site, which does include links to relevant outside work. When Keranen linked the Jones swarm to disposal wells, the O.G.S. linked it to water levels at nearby Lake Arcadia, producing a study that did not appear in a peer-reviewed journal. A U.S.G.S. researcher wrote to Holland, concerned that trying to link the earthquakes to lake levels could be "distracting from the larger issue of earthquake safety in Oklahoma." Holland replied that he was "quite skeptical of the potential link" but that the O.C.C. had asked him to study it.

The O.G.S. received an early copy of Keranen's Prague work. The day before it was published, the survey's director at the time, Randy Keller, posted a position statement saying that the O.G.S. believed that the Prague quakes most probably resulted from natural causes. The statement, which also had Austin Holland's name attached to it, made no mention of any relevant peer-reviewed scientific research and was itself not published in a peer-reviewed journal. (Holland said that he was "not comfortable with the way it was worded.") To date, no journal-published, peer-reviewed work on the specific role of disposal wells in Oklahoma's earth-

quakes has come out of the O.G.S. Keller, who has since retired, told me, "We just go about our business, day to day, locating earthquakes and scratching our heads and installing new seismic stations and wondering what the heck is going on. It's just such a complex, fuzzy picture."

E-mail archives of the O.G.S. reveal that Keller's objectivity on the issue of induced seismicity was widely doubted at the university, with one researcher writing that the agency "couldn't track a bunny through fresh snow!" Holland said to me, "My focus now is on getting a clean database together, so that any researcher—researchers outside of the state or country, researchers anywhere—can make use of that data."

In October, 2013, the U.S.G.S. and the O.G.S. issued a joint press release warning that the chance of an earthquake of magnitude 5.5 or higher had "significantly increased." The release quoted a statement that Oklahoma has "always been earthquake country," but no reference to Oklahoma as "earthquake country"—a consistent talking point of the O.C.C. and the O.G.S.—can be found in any database predating the recent earthquakes.

Shortly after the press release, Holland e-mailed a colleague at the O.G.S., saying, "I have been asked to have 'coffee' with president Boren and Harold Hamm." The colleague replied, "Gosh, I guess that's better than having Kool-Aid with them." David Boren, a former U.S. senator, has been the president of O.U. for twenty years, and sits on the board of Hamm's oil company, Continental Resources. Hamm has donated more than thirty million dollars to O.U.

In another note after the joint statement, Holland wrote to Keller and the university's dean, Larry Grillot, about a meeting he had had with Patrice Douglas, a commissioner of the O.C.C.: "Jack Stark, the senior vice-president of exploration with Continental Resources, was there. The basic gist of the meeting is that Continental does not feel that induced seismicity is an issue, and they are nervous about any dialogue about the subject."

Of course, sometimes I wish I was back in an area of scientific research that only a few experts cared about," Austin Holland told me. O.G.S. is understaffed, and from 2010 to 2014 Holland was able to publish only two

peer-reviewed papers, neither dealing specifically with disposal wells. This year, though, he has already co-written two papers. In late January, he was one of eight authors of a paper that catalogued the thirty-six hundred and thirty-nine earthquakes of magnitude 3.0 or greater in Oklahoma between late 2009 and 2014; the paper sidestepped the question of any relation between energy exploration and earthquakes but noted that significantly larger earthquakes can be expected to occur along the fault lines that recent earthquakes have traced. In February, he was one of twelve authors of a paper, published in the policy forum of *Science*, that discussed the now obvious point that induced earthquakes are not, like natural earthquakes, a matter of chance.

Chance is important to the oil and gas industry, which retains something of the luck-culture mythos of its earliest days. Companies are usually called "players," and they "win" or "are awarded" contracts; the areas they explore are "plays." Once, there was a fair amount of chance involved in striking oil. Stories of poor people coming across "gushers" on their property, or of discovering unknown inheritances of mineral rights, are emotionally important, and widely shared, in Oklahoma. And the tradition of Okie endurance—of uncomplainingly handling dust storms, tornadoes, poor soil, economic depressions—heightens the sense that Lady Fortune spins you up, spins you down. Maybe it's not surprising that Oklahoma's earthquakes have been in large part treated as simply one more hardship to withstand, a matter of bad luck following good.

But today the oil and gas industry understands that exploration is not a matter of a lucky hand. Science is as powerful epistemologically as it is weak politically. "I don't rely on luck," David Chernicky told the *Oklahoma City Journal Record*, in 2010, about a dewatering process he helped develop. "I rely on science because I've never been lucky in my life." He continued, "I never won a raffle. The only thing I got was out of a Cracker Jack box, but then everybody gets something out of that box." ♦

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THE KINGS OF THE DESERT

An American banker, a Saudi billionaire, and a financial collapse that stunned the Middle East.

BY NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

When Glenn Stewart enrolled at the University of Oxford, in 1975, he was not a typical first-year student: a twenty-year-old American with mediocre grades, he had taken neither A-level exams nor Oxford's entrance test. But he had an unusual degree of confidence, and, after securing a strong reference from an English grammar school that he'd attended for a year, he persuaded an Oxford admissions officer to let him in.

Stewart had grown up in the Washington, D.C., suburb of College Park, Maryland, where his father taught chemistry at the University of Maryland. An enterprising kid, he made money on weekends by selling soda in the bleachers at college football games. After Stewart's junior year in high school, his father went to England on sabbatical and took the family along. As Stewart later wrote in a self-published memoir, "A Gentleman and a Player," he loved being among foreigners: "I could tell they were bemused by my brashness, never having met a Yank up close before." After a year at the grammar school, he reluctantly followed his family back home, received his diploma, and completed a couple of semesters at the University of Maryland. America bored him, however, and he sought his fortunes abroad.

At Oxford, Stewart, who was tall and lean, with long brown hair, exuded what one classmate called a "sense of adventure." He joined a clique of theatre enthusiasts who included Rowan Atkinson, of "Mr. Bean," and Pierre Audi, a student from Lebanon, who now directs the Dutch National Opera. Audi told me that Stewart had seemed unusually attuned to other cultures. The tumult in the Middle East—the Yom Kippur War, the OPEC oil embargo—made a strong impression on Stewart. Where others saw a crisis, he glimpsed opportunity. He began intensive study of Arabic and Islamic history. His thesis explored

Byzantine-Hamdanid relations in the tenth century and the evolution of the Christian concept of holy war. While Audi was trying to "run away from the Middle East," he told me, Stewart was charging toward it.

Stewart graduated in 1978. He wanted to pursue a career in intelligence, but the C.I.A. rejected his application. He fantasized about a life in the theatre, but, as he told me not long ago, he decided that "the best thing to do was to go and try to make money first." He passed the C.P.A. exam and worked briefly as an accountant in San Francisco, where he dated a colleague, Donna Gannon. They married, and in 1983 they moved to Saudi Arabia after he took a job in Khobar, a drab city on the Gulf coast which anchors the country's oil industry.

After two years, he and Donna moved twenty miles east of Khobar, to the island kingdom of Bahrain. They had two sons. In Bahrain, most Westerners lived in gated compounds, but Stewart and his family rented an apartment in a predominantly Arab neighborhood. Compared with Saudi Arabia, he told me, Bahrain was freewheeling—"really open, with bars in hotels and restaurants."

In 1989, Stewart got a job with a wealthy Saudi family from Khobar, the Gosaibis. They had made billions of dollars by investing in real estate; by bottling and distributing Pepsi; and by selling steel piping to Saudi Aramco, the national oil-and-natural-gas behemoth. The family business was known as AHAB—the Ahmad Hamad al-Gosaibi Brothers. In the eighties, AHAB had opened a trading house and an investment company in the capital of Bahrain, Manama, which became an Arab financial hub after civil war in Lebanon diminished the allure of Beirut.

Stewart worked at the Gosaibis' trading and investment companies, specializing in commodities deals and in Islamic finance, which prohibits the sale

of debt and the collection of interest on debt. After several years, he developed a relationship with Maan al-Sanea, a son-in-law of the Gosaibis, who was one of the more dynamic executives in the family business. According to Brooks Wrampelmeier, a retired U.S. diplomat who served as consul-general in the Saudi city of Dhahran, the Gosaibis were "traditional types," but Sanea, who was in his mid-thirties, was a bold entrepreneur, eager to explore "new ways in which money could be moved."

Over time, Stewart earned Sanea's trust. "As I performed, he had more confidence in me," Stewart said. "My job was to raise money and loan facilities, and I did it very effectively." Their partnership was soon making an astonishing amount of money. But according to a corporate-investigation firm, a team of forensic accountants, and a law firm in Washington, D.C., hired by the Gosaibis, their success wasn't entirely a reflection of financial skill. Stewart and Sanea, they contend, presided over a business, the International Banking Corporation (T.I.B.C.), that perpetrated a multi-billion-dollar fraud—and then left the Gosaibis with the bill.

Stewart and Sanea strongly deny any wrongdoing, and say that ultimate financial responsibility lies with the Gosaibis. (A headline in the *Wall Street Journal* has characterized the dispute as a "SAUDI FAMILY FEUD.") The scandal has inspired litigation in ten countries, with several cases still ongoing. But one thing seems clear: T.I.B.C. issued a series of fake loans, and in 2009 it imploded in spectacular fashion, triggering the largest corporate default in the history of the Middle East.

In the nineteen-seventies, three Gosaibi brothers—Suleiman, Abdulaziz, and Ahmad—oversaw the family business. Abdulaziz, the middle brother, "masterminded the company's growth,"



The International Banking Corporation, in Bahrain, generated billions of dollars while issuing a series of fake loans.

Michael Field wrote, in a chapter devoted to the Gosaibis in his 1984 book, "The Merchants: The Big Business Families of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States." Abdulaziz had five daughters and a son. In 1980, one of his daughters married a distant relative from Kuwait: Maan al-Sanea. His family lived comfortably, but compared with the Gosaibis its assets were modest; years later, he presented himself in a corporate pamphlet as a "self-made man." Sanea, who had received combat training from the Kuwaiti Air Force, was self-assured, and he arrived at his wedding in a red Rolls-Royce. A family member who attended the wedding told the *Wall Street Journal* that other guests considered this "a bit unseemly."

Abdulaziz's only son, Saud, lacked Sanea's poise and command, and Abdulaziz treated Sanea like his own child. Their closeness caused resentment. Later, in a deposition, one of Sanea's in-laws contended that Sanea "was not liked" by some of the Gosaibis; Sanea, in a court filing, acknowledged the friction and recalled that, during a dispute over office space, a Gosaibi relative had once "put a gun to my head." (No one in the Gosaibi family agreed to be interviewed for this article.)

In 1981, Abdulaziz asked Sanea to run the Money Exchange—a business, based in Khobar, that gave expatriate workers a convenient way to send wages

home, and offered a few basic financial services. The Money Exchange also functioned as an in-house bank for the Gosaibi family, whose members could withdraw funds to cover personal expenses and to support other AHAB enterprises. Sanea was determined to expand the Money Exchange, and an ad was placed in the *Financial Times* promoting its capacity to provide "a wide range of financial services." Over the next two decades, the business grew significantly. Sanea was a controlling boss—he liked to be called Sheikh Maan—and he strictly supervised communication, especially when it concerned the Gosaibis; in 2004, he issued a memo declaring that "all mail and or correspondence addressed to Uncle Suleiman or Saud al-Gosaibi should be forwarded to my office for my review first."

Sanea became increasingly rich, and invested some of his money in large projects. In Khobar, he built a private hospital and developed a housing compound for expatriates that contained an indoor ice-skating rink. He also spent lavishly on himself, maintaining a seaside mansion and amassing a collection of exotic animals, including lion cubs and flamingos. In a court filing, he estimated the value of his "safari animals" to be between thirteen and twenty-three million dollars. A few years ago, one of Sanea's lawyers told a judge in the U.K. that his client spent approximately eight

hundred thousand dollars a month on electrical, telephone, gas, water, and satellite bills, noting, "He has a *zoo*, my lord." At one point, Sanea bought an Airbus A320, a commercial jetliner that costs ninety million dollars.

Sanea's financial success rested, in no small part, on his in-laws' excellent reputation. In the Gulf, credit bureaus were considered an invasion of privacy; they have only recently come into existence there. Traditionally, bankers borrowed and lent money based on prestige, a practice known as name-lending. Bijan Kian, a former chairman of the U.S. Export-Import Bank's audit committee, told me that the Gosaibis were "among the cleanest, best names in Saudi Arabia." Anthony Harris, a former British Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, who now works in financial services in Dubai, said that Sanea was known in the Gulf as "the king of leverage." He could persuade "banks to lend twice, on the same collateral, all because of the Gosaibi name."

By the nineties, Sanea's borrowing lines at the Money Exchange had been stretched "to capacity," according to Peter Shepherd, its former treasurer. Some of the Gosaibis wanted to shut down the business, but Shepherd—whose job required him to monitor the inflow and outflow of cash—told me that Sanea continued borrowing money aggressively for the Money Exchange, some of which he passed on as loans to his private businesses. By this time, the Gosaibi brothers were getting old, and Shepherd said that Saud, Abdulaziz's son, "didn't have the character to stand up" to Sanea. (Memos corroborate this dynamic. In 2006, Saud wrote to Sanea after noticing an expansion of the Money Exchange's credit lines, and gingerly discouraged him from keeping the extra funds: "If the intent is not to use the increased facility and keep it as stand by, would like to suggest to allocate the increase to Algosaiabi head office.")

Around this time, Glenn Stewart began advising Sanea on various short-term finance mechanisms, including transactions that were compatible with Sharia law. Stewart was cultivating an expertise in Islamic finance. Khalid Janahi, a Bahraini banker living in Switzerland, said that Stewart's "knowledge was much more advanced than a lot of



"I enjoy role-playing, but do we really need the dramaturge?"

Muslim Islamic bankers' knowledge." In 1997, Stewart helped create one of the first publicly traded Sharia-compliant mutual funds that was licensed for Western markets. According to the *New Straits Times*, a newspaper in Malaysia, where Islamic banking was becoming prevalent, the mutual fund was a "pioneering" effort. For a while, Shepherd said, Sharia-compliant banking became Sanea's "top dog." Stewart relished having gained the trust of Sanea, whom he considered remarkably industrious: "The guy worked from the time he got up in the morning until he went to bed at night, seven days a week. He burned people out. I work pretty damn hard, and I could hardly keep up with him."

In January, 2001, Stewart proposed opening a bank in Bahrain. Although the Money Exchange often operated like a bank, it did not have the legal authority to perform some key transactions, such as issuing letters of credit. Moreover, as Stewart wrote in a memo to Sanea, establishing the new business in Bahrain would "increase the level of comfort that international banks would have in dealing with us." (In the 2001 Economic Freedom index, published annually by the *Wall Street Journal* and the Heritage Foundation, Bahrain ranked eleventh—just below Switzerland.) Stewart added, "The advantage of this is that a number of banks we deal with could raise their limits to us substantially, as they would be lending to a bank and not a corporation." Sanea replied, in a memo, "Please proceed to apply for a license."

After the collapse of T.I.B.C., Adam Ereli, a former U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain, was briefed by Bahraini officials and by representatives from credit-rating agencies. In these conversations, he told me, he heard many "charges and counter-charges" about "forgeries on financial statements" and "financial arrangements that weren't approved by the board." He went on, "These were all allegations. But what wasn't alleged was that about ten billion dollars disappeared. That doesn't happen because of some bad investments."

On May 22, 2003, the International Banking Corporation opened for business on the tenth floor of a Manama office tower. Sanea, based in Khobar, assumed the title of managing director.

Stewart became the C.E.O., and spent much of his time travelling, meeting with representatives from other banks, and presenting T.I.B.C. as a financial institution fully backed by the Gosaibi family. Stewart announced that one of T.I.B.C.'s focusses would be lending to small- and medium-sized businesses in Saudi Arabia, albeit indirectly, by relaying funds from Bahrain to the Money Exchange, which would then disburse the loans to customers in Saudi Arabia. This was a byzantine arrangement. Why wouldn't T.I.B.C. disburse the loans on its own? Stewart told me that Sanea wanted the funds to pass first through the Money Exchange, where he had full control.

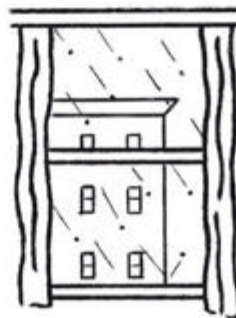
Stewart deployed his Arabic skills and cultural knowledge at every opportunity. He sometimes started meetings by reciting a speech given by al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, a governor of Iraq at the turn of the eighth century. "It's the most famous political speech in Arab history," he told me. "It's like if you had an Arab who could quote the Gettysburg Address. It showed off my Arabic and it showed off my erudition. It would impress the hell out of them."

By 2008, T.I.B.C. had the third-highest capital-to-risk ratio among Arab banks. Standard & Poor's had praised its rapid growth. Much of the bank's strength stemmed from its roster of loan customers in Saudi Arabia. From 2004 to 2009, T.I.B.C. loaned \$6.3 billion to more than a hundred customers there. Some loans were as large as sixty-seven million dollars, and many customers renewed their loans multiple times. According to bank records, T.I.B.C. was lending seven and a half million dollars to a textile merchant, twelve million to a man who traded in "décor items," thirty-five million to support an auto-parts dealer, and eighteen million to a seller of "toys" and "musical equipment."

These loans were not real. Mark Hayley, a former general manager of the Money Exchange, later declared, in a statement submitted to courts in the U.K., "The entire arrangement was a device to transfer money from T.I.B.C. to the Money Exchange, which would then become funding for use by Mr. Al-Sanea"

and his personal company, the Saad Group. Hayley portrayed the loan operation to me in military terms: Sanea acted the role of field marshal, with Stewart as his "main general."

It's not entirely clear how T.I.B.C. assembled a roster of fake loans, but clues have emerged. In February, 2010, the Bahraini government commissioned Kroll, the corporate-investigation firm, to conduct a forensic analysis of the collapse of T.I.B.C.; the investigation was paid for by the Gosaibis. Kroll concluded that Sanea had "provided Glenn Stewart with the names and relevant documents pertaining to the Saudi entities which served as loan customers." In January, 2005, Stewart wrote to Sanea, "As



per our discussion, could you please forward to us the financial statements of another ten companies?" That October, Stewart requested the corporate registrations for "two new companies in Saudi Arabia." Some of these purported loan customers, Kroll reported, were "closely related" to Sanea, including family members and employees.

Sometimes, Kroll noted, the names of real businesses appeared in T.I.B.C.'s loan book—without the companies' knowledge. In several instances, their financial documents had been baldly inflated: the corporate registration of one Saudi construction-and-paint company, whose authentic documents listed the equivalent, in Saudi riyals, of twenty-six hundred dollars in capital, was amended to reflect \$2.6 million in capital. More capital meant bigger loans. Because the businesses didn't know about the loan accounts that had been created in their names, the funds remained on deposit at the Money Exchange, the institution from which Sanea borrowed heavily. A former AHAB manager told Kroll that this process was tantamount to identity theft.

In 2004, Sanea established another bank in Bahrain, and that December he stepped down as managing director of T.I.B.C.: the central bank of Bahrain frowned upon individuals holding senior positions at multiple banks. In October, 2005, he also left T.I.B.C.'s board

of directors. Sanea no longer had any official role at the bank, but he remained engaged in its affairs. Around this time, an “executive committee” was established at T.I.B.C.; Sanea participated in decision-making and issued directives through the committee—even though it officially comprised only Stewart, Saud al-Gosaibi, and Suleiman al-Gosaibi. Investigators obtained memos in which Sanea’s handwriting appears under the signature “the ‘executive committee.’” Three former colleagues separately told me that correspondence with the executive committee never involved any Gosaibis. (In a court filing, Sanea has said that he did “continue to give my advice after my resignation, particularly on borrowings by T.I.B.C.,” but “at the request of Suleiman al-Gosaibi.”)

The former AHAB manager, who worked closely with both Sanea and Stewart, told me that the two men oversaw T.I.B.C.’s lending operation together, with Stewart focussing on “the mechanics of getting things done.” Stewart made sure that the bank’s records appeared meticulous. In a 2003 memo, he explained to Sanea that loan confirmations from the Money Exchange’s back office would help “create the necessary paper trail” for assuring auditors or regulators. In 2005, external auditors informed Stewart that the same fax number was being used to send them audit confirmations for T.I.B.C. loan customers. In a subsequent memo that Stewart sent to Sanea, he wrote, “Each customer should have its own FedEx account. Further, each customer should have its own fax line.”

T.I.B.C.’s annual reports noted that Gosaibi family members owned the bank and sat on its board. But Peter Belmont, a non-executive board member at T.I.B.C., never saw any Gosaibis at the board meetings he attended. According to Belmont, who is now retired in Florida, Stewart and another T.I.B.C. employee—both of whom claimed to possess proxies—attended in the Gosaibis’ stead. Belmont found the bank’s atmosphere troublingly secretive. After he expressed concern about the family’s absence to Stewart and his colleagues, Alistair MacLeod, T.I.B.C.’s chief operating officer at the time, wrote to Stewart, “I think you will have to be clear with Mr. Belmont. Fall into line

or resign!” Belmont did not press the matter further, and left the board the next year. After T.I.B.C. collapsed, he was shown board minutes that, he said, falsely indicated the presence of Gosaibi family members at meetings he had attended.

In 2007, Sanea bought a 3.1-per-cent share in H.S.B.C., the British bank. The position, valued at more than six billion dollars, made him the second-largest shareholder. His spokesman declared that Sanea was now “a substantial player” in world financial markets. That year, *Forbes* estimated Sanea’s wealth at seven and a half billion dollars, listing him as the ninety-seventh-richest man in the world. The most affluent Gosaibi, Suleiman, was ranked seven hundred and seventeenth. Sanea continued spending liberally. He hired a “food and beverage manager” to look after his wine cellars. In October, 2009, a wine retailer assessed one of Sanea’s wine collections and deemed it worth \$1.1 million.

Stewart, who declined to discuss how he was compensated during his years in Bahrain, didn’t become rich enough to make the *Forbes* list, but he profited tremendously. In 2007, he bought an eight-million-dollar residence in Malibu. He already owned a four-bedroom house in Pacific Palisades—a real-estate listing later described its décor as “Mykonos meets the Mexican Riviera”—as well as apartments in London, Oxford, and Leeds. Records show that he held most of the English properties through financial instruments called special-purpose vehicles, which he had incorporated in offshore tax havens in Bermuda, Cyprus, and the British Virgin Islands. S.P.V.s are commonly used to limit tax exposure and liability. Records obtained for one of Stewart’s S.P.V.s, registered on the Caribbean island of Nevis, show that, as of October, 2006, it held more than twenty-four million dollars in assets. Stewart said of the S.P.V.s, “My lawyers recommended them.” He added, “It’s also a tax-efficient way to invest in U.K. real estate.”

Having made a fortune, Stewart focussed anew on the arts. He produced and wrote the book for a musical, “The City Club,” at the 2004 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The story centered on the “privileged scion of a spectacularly corrupt

family,” according to publicity materials. At the festival, he met some German film producers, and they decided to make movies together, ultimately arranging financing for a dozen films, including “The Mysteries of Pittsburgh,” “Lesbian Vampire Killers,” and “The Messenger.” Stewart would not specify to me how much money he put into these projects, but Michael London, who co-produced “The Mysteries of Pittsburgh,” told me that Stewart and the Germans contributed roughly half of the film’s five-million-dollar budget. Stewart said, “The films as a package lost money, but a few of the individuals made money. I personally did not.”

In the autumn of 2008, the Wall Street financial crisis began disrupting global markets, and Stewart struggled to hold T.I.B.C. together. The fall of Lehman Brothers, in September, “created a complete panic and started melting the system,” he said. Banks called in their loans to T.I.B.C. Since it would be impossible for Stewart to call in T.I.B.C.’s fake loans, he tried to maintain liquidity by deepening the bank’s reliance on short-term financial remedies—most notably, the split-value foreign-exchange deal. Such transactions take advantage of the fact that banks exchanging currency often operate in different time zones and on different working calendars. If, say, a bank in New York paid T.I.B.C. a hundred dollars on a Thursday afternoon, in exchange for the equivalent in Saudi riyals, T.I.B.C. could not make a return payment until Sunday, because banks in Bahrain are closed on Friday and Saturday. But on Sunday the banks in New York are closed, so such a deal could not be settled until Monday. Meanwhile, T.I.B.C. would acquire an extra hundred dollars in liquidity for the weekend. Transactions like these staved off immediate disaster, but, because of accruing interest, they piled up even more debt.

By the spring of 2009, T.I.B.C. was facing potential default. Stewart flew to Dubai in April and pleaded his case to one of T.I.B.C.’s major creditors, Mashreq Bank, which is based in the Emirates. He asked John Iossifidis, a top Mashreq executive, to temporarily extend its lending limits. According to an affidavit later filed by Iossifidis, in New York, Stewart “emphasized that he

spoke for both T.I.B.C. and AHAB,” and proposed a split-value foreign-exchange deal in which AHAB would receive a hundred and fifty million dollars. As collateral, Stewart pledged two hundred million dollars in AHAB-owned corporate shares.

The next day, Mashreq advanced a hundred and fifty million dollars to AHAB. Stewart promised to return the money, in Saudi riyals, a week later. The riyals came due on May 5th, but instead of paying back the money Stewart asked for seventy-five million dollars more, this time expressly for T.I.B.C. Mashreq agreed. The next day, Stewart met again with Iossifidis and assured him that the Gosaibis would repay the debt in full. The Gosaibis, who had learned of the bank’s endangered status, echoed these assurances to Mashreq.

On May 11th, however, T.I.B.C. defaulted on the deal, and AHAB, as the owner of the bank, now owed Mashreq a quarter of a billion dollars. T.I.B.C. was also indebted to sixty-two other banks, and couldn’t afford to pay them back, either.

The same day that Stewart met with Iossifidis, Tariq Ali, an American-educated banker with substantial experience in debt restructuring, met in Khobar with Jamal al-Muzein, a lawyer representing Sanea. Muzein, who had initiated the meeting, told Ali that the Money Exchange had defaulted on sizable foreign-exchange deals and that the Gosaibis wanted him to help quickly set things right. Muzein estimated the debt to be somewhere between a billion and two and a half billion dollars. After a preliminary review of the documentation, Ali determined that the debt was likely much greater—between five and six billion. He asked Muzein to arrange for him to meet with Saud al-Gosaibi, Sanea’s brother-in-law.

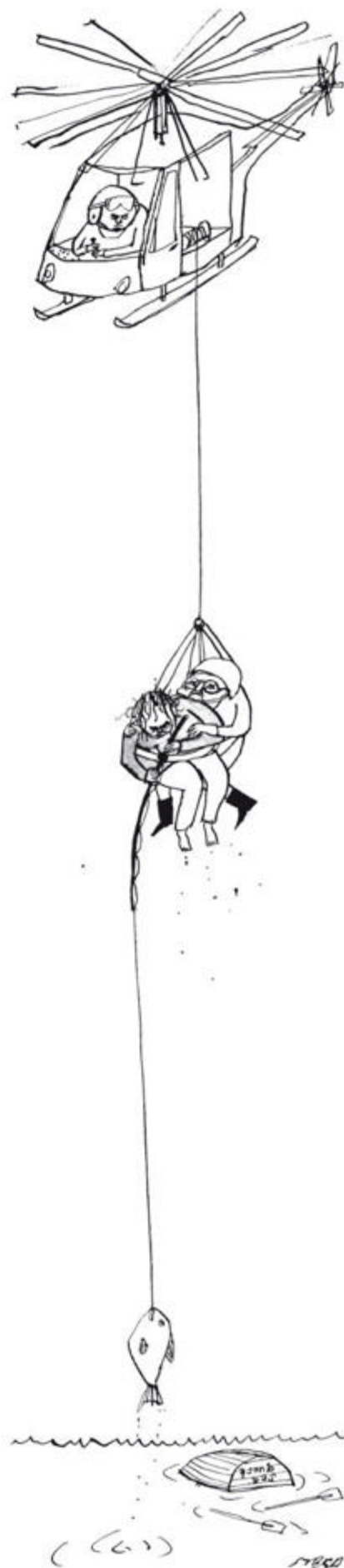
The next day, Muzein drove Ali to see Saud. Along the way, Muzein urged Ali not to mention his six-billion-dollar estimate to Saud, who was “in deep shock” about the crisis; hearing such a figure “might be too much for him.” The request made Ali uneasy, but he complied and told Saud simply that the Gosaibis owed a lot of money because of unchecked name-lending. Ali told me that Saud appeared not to realize that the

family owed billions: “You could see it in his body language—he was aware that something had happened but didn’t know exactly what.”

Ali then went to Bahrain to meet with Stewart, whom he found “brash and dismissive.” Stewart told him that he had recently been called in to discuss T.I.B.C.’s default with regulators from the central bank of Bahrain, and that he had proposed resolving the matter by merging T.I.B.C. and the Money Exchange. Ali asked Stewart who had given him the authority to negotiate with the central bank on behalf of the Gosaibis. Stewart replied that he had mentioned it to T.I.B.C.’s executive committee. Ali asked Stewart who sat on the executive committee. “I can’t tell you,” Stewart said. (Stewart has since claimed that he was not being secretive, only careful, because he didn’t know whose interests Ali was representing.)

Though a full picture of T.I.B.C.’s business activities eluded Ali, he came away feeling that the bank had taken advantage of the Gosaibis’ reputation. “They were a pristine name,” Ali told me, adding, “That was what was exploited.” A key way that Stewart facilitated the operation, Ali claimed, was by helping T.I.B.C. to maintain liquidity when its loan book was not generating money. Stewart made particular use of his expertise in *murabaha* transactions. They involve inflating the cost of an item in order to sidestep variable interest rates, which are forbidden by Sharia law. In the Gulf, Ali said, it was widely known that the Gosaibis needed aluminum in connection with their Pepsi-canning operation, and T.I.B.C. repeatedly “did these Islamic-banking transactions where you buy and sell aluminum.” Ali added, “They really needed liquidity.”

Ali was startled by the T.I.B.C. loan book. “Never in my life, anywhere in the world, have I seen a loan portfolio like that,” he said. As far as Ali could tell from the bank’s documentation, only one loan—to a relative of Sanea’s in Kuwait—had not been repaid. Otherwise, T.I.B.C. appeared to have a perfect record: “No losses, no watch list, no past dues, no delinquencies.” Ali suggested to Stewart that a loan book this immaculate could be sold at a premium price. According to Ali, Stewart said, “I don’t think



you should count on the loan book.”

I asked Ali if he had identified any legitimate business activity at T.I.B.C. “None,” he said. “All of it was liquidity generated for the benefit of the principal”—Sanea. “And Glenn was an instrument of that.” Ali could not imagine how a top executive at T.I.B.C. could have remained unaware of the loan book’s vaporous nature. He said of Stewart, “If he didn’t know, then he’s stupid. Or there was some other reason why he chose not to question or investigate. I mean, it took us a total of a week.”

After confronting Stewart, Ali drove across the causeway linking Bahrain to Saudi Arabia and spoke again with Saud al-Gosaibi. Ali had taken a printout of the customer and business names from T.I.B.C.’s loan-book files, and he asked Saud if he recognized any of them. According to a statement that Ali later filed in a London court, Saud identified several names as belonging to “relatives and friends” of Sanea’s. But why had Sanea’s driver needed a twenty-five-million-dollar loan? What was the son of Sanea’s public-affairs manager doing with twenty million dollars’ worth of loans for agricultural equipment? (The son, who currently lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan, confirmed to me that his father works for Sanea, but he refused to comment further about how his name ended up on T.I.B.C.’s loan-customer list, saying, “I don’t know anything about this.”)

Ali eventually told Saud that his family might owe as much as eight billion dollars. According to Ali, Saud told him, “I don’t know where this money went,” and then said of Sanea, “He would know.”

When Ali informed Muzein, the lawyer representing Sanea, what he had come to believe about mismanagement at T.I.B.C., he was brushed off. Ali went back to Saud, who told him, “Deal with my office now.”

Saud began hiring lawyers and brought in outside consultants. In July, 2009, he retained Eric Lewis, an attorney based in Washington, D.C., to defend the Gosaibi family against lawsuits being filed by irate banks, and to devise a legal strategy to recover assets from Sanea. Lewis, who has written about legal affairs for this magazine’s

HUSBAND

Some things can surprise you in both directions,
coming and going.

Like a stretch of single train track with shuntings over.

The auto-correct I don’t know how to stop
suggested, just now, “overwhelming,”
with shuntings overwhelming. Almost I took that.

Almost I took you as husband, love. Then you left me.

I took surprise for husband instead.

The Phoenician letter for “h,” pronounced *heth*,
resembled at first
a slanting, three-runged ladder.
Later it straightened, becoming a double-hung window.

Husband surprise, I climbed you, I climbed right out you.

—Jane Hirshfield

Web site, knew the terrain well. In the nineteen-nineties, he had represented creditors who lost money after the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, which, among other misdeeds, had laundered money for the Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega. More recently, he had worked with international liquidators to recover assets from Bernard Madoff’s gigantic financial fraud, which had amounted to a loss of seventeen billion dollars. Lewis noted to me that the losses associated with T.I.B.C.’s collapse were even bigger: together, the Gosaibis and Sanea owed twenty-two billion dollars.

Lewis began preparing litigation, and he eventually filed a complaint in California, because Stewart owned property there. (Stewart’s wife, along with their younger son, had moved into the Pacific Palisades house shortly after T.I.B.C. failed.) In the complaint, Lewis called Stewart a “primary co-conspirator and accomplice of al-Sanea” in perpetrating a multibillion-dollar “Ponzi scheme.” (Sanea denies that any Ponzi scheme took place.) Stewart, Lewis went on, had “devised and agreed to participate in an unlawful scheme whereby T.I.B.C. purported to engage

in lending to phony ‘loan customers’ as a means to filter funds to the Money Exchange where they were channeled into the operational costs of the fraud and/or into al-Sanea’s pockets.” The complaint also alleged that Stewart had “misappropriated” a hundred million dollars for himself.

Lewis collaborated with a forensic-accounting team from Deloitte, which had been hired by the Gosaibis to examine the records at the Money Exchange. Unravelling a conspiracy often takes more than finding memos or scouring a hard drive. It can require an insider to decode the jottings in a margin or the oblique references in an e-mail. In June, 2009, Mark Hayley, the Money Exchange’s former general manager, was one of several employees who decided to cooperate with the investigation. According to the Deloitte team, Hayley described how Stewart borrowed money at T.I.B.C. using the loan book to attract funding, and how most of the money flowed into Sanea’s accounts. Stewart, Hayley said, had kept the operation running at Sanea’s behest. William Asante, the project manager of Deloitte’s team, told me that “Glenn definitely played a key role.” (Stewart said, “I’m shocked at how shabby a job Deloitte has done

on all of this. They just don't understand it." In legal filings, Sanea has called Deloitte's investigation "defective" and "its reporting misleading.")

To vet T.I.B.C.'s loan book, Asante printed out the addresses of several supposed customers and drove around Khobar. He went to the alleged address of a Saudi contractor who traded in agricultural goods and had purportedly received a nineteen-million-dollar loan; Asante discovered a low-income housing project. At the supposed address of a trader in "cooked and uncooked foodstuffs" who had taken out an eighteen-million-dollar loan, Asante found a bariatric surgeon named Sultan al-Temyatt. I recently spoke with Temyatt. From August, 2004, through August, 2009, he worked at Sanea's hospital in Khobar. He denied ever applying for such a loan, or receiving such a loan, adding that he had never heard of T.I.B.C. before its collapse. He said of the loan applications showing his name and signature, "I never signed them.... I had no idea at all about these documents." When I asked him how his personal information might have been obtained, he said that he didn't know. He noted, "The hospital, they have all the information of the staff." (No evidence has emerged to suggest that any hospital personnel were involved in releasing such data, and the hospital insists that it did not do so.)

Another former hospital employee whose name ended up in the loan book is a cousin of Sanea's named Maan al-Dughaiter. He is a small-business owner, and in 2006 he supposedly took out a twelve-million-dollar loan. "This is all forgery," Dughaiter said. "I didn't get anything. You can come and see how I live. If I had twelve million dollars, you will see me right now driving a Ferrari in Beverly Hills!"

Recently, I began calling, at random, other people whose names appeared in T.I.B.C.'s loan book, and I spoke to five of them. According to the bank's records, these individuals had collectively borrowed more than a hundred and ten million dollars. They all told me that they had never sought or received any loan from T.I.B.C. Three of them had worked at the Khobar hospital. One man worriedly asked me if this meant that authorities would attempt to collect the imaginary debt.

Deloitte's investigation also turned up seeming irregularities in documents that featured signatures from Saud's uncle Suleiman al-Gosaibi. Suleiman died in February, 2009, after an illness. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, one AHAB document suggested that he had approved a transaction on the same day that, according to his medical records, he was unconscious in a Zurich hospital. In 2012, the Forensic Institute of Zurich examined two of Suleiman al-Gosaibi's signatures on a separate document. It determined that a "slow and unspontaneous" hand had produced the signatures, and concluded "with a probability bordering on certainty" that they were forgeries.

Two months after T.I.B.C. defaulted, Stewart booked a flight to London. As he was passing through immigration, an official prohibited him from boarding. "You have a problem with the Ministry of Justice," the official told him. Only then did Stewart learn that Bahrain's top prosecutor, Nawaf Hamza, had imposed a travel ban on him, at the behest of the central bank of Bahrain, in connection with an ongoing investigation into T.I.B.C. conducted by Ernst & Young.

The Ernst & Young team members spent several weeks at T.I.B.C.'s offices. According to their report, they encountered "significant stalling" from the management, but some employees eventually began cooperating. T.I.B.C.'s credit-risk officer, Irene Evangelista, told the investigators that the bank's "credit committee"—ostensibly formed in 2008, to review and approve all lending transactions—had "not had a single meeting." (The bank's annual report suggested that the committee had met three times that year.) She added that "all the minutes" of the committee "are fake and have been prepared by me." I recently spoke with Evangelista, who now lives in the Philippines. She described her experience at T.I.B.C. as "traumatic," but refused to elaborate, saying, "If you have a signed and sworn statement from me taken by Ernst & Young, you have everything you need."

Another credit officer, Brenda Jonas, also provided a signed statement to Ernst & Young investigators, describing the genesis of the loan-application

process. She said that Afzal Abaali, Stewart's chief risk officer, initiated loans by supplying her with three documents: a corporate-registration number, a passport copy, and a photo-I.D. copy that "he allegedly receives from Saudi Arabia." All other application documents, Jonas said, were "drafted and completed by me." At one point, she noted, she was told to "draft referral and recommendation letters for all the customers since 2003." She was not comfortable backdating the letters, but she was "obliged to do so." After the interview, Jonas arranged to meet with an Ernst & Young investigator in T.I.B.C.'s parking garage, where she handed over a bag filled with loan documents that she said she had been instructed to remove from the bank's premises. (Jonas, who is from the Philippines, could not be reached for comment. Abaali denies initiating the loans, calling Jonas's account "baseless.")

Ernst & Young investigators interviewed Stewart at length. He told them that he did not think Sanea had "stolen any money from the al-Gosaibis," but said that Sanea had "misused his position of trust" within the family "to borrow money from institutions around the world to finance the expansion" of his own businesses. Stewart distanced himself from any wrongdoing. Indeed, he later told me that his statements to Ernst & Young about Sanea misusing his position of trust had been given under duress.

At one point, an Ernst & Young investigator told Stewart that he found T.I.B.C.'s lending practices "exceptionally strange." Stewart replied, "If I had known that these loans were fictitious or irregular, I would not have signed any of the loan approvals, and I may well have resigned." Besides, he added, "What do I know about what really goes on in the Kingdom, and the way things actually work there?" Stewart, once so determined to show off his mastery of Arab culture, was now presenting himself as a functionary. He told me recently, "I considered myself to be a glorified servant and the majordomo, which is to say the chief house slave."

In July, 2009, Ernst & Young submitted a report to the central bank of Bahrain, concluding that Stewart and a few of his top managers "must reasonably

have known that the loans created for the transfer of the excess capital to the Exchange were irregular.”

The Gosaibis filed a criminal complaint against Sanea and Stewart, and in 2010 Nawaf Hamza, the Bahraini prosecutor, hired Kroll, the corporate-investigation firm, to delve into the matter. As Kroll staffers imaged Stewart’s computer and searched through boxes of documents, they discovered oddly similar grammatical errors in the audit reports for the bank’s numerous loan customers. In four sets of financial statements on file at T.I.B.C.—ostensibly prepared by four separate auditors for four separate businesses—four sentences began with the phrase “Monetary assets and liabilities Denominated in foreign currencies,” with each sentence featuring the anomalous uppercase “D.” In several reports, the word “equity” was repeatedly misspelled as “equty.” Kroll concluded that the audits were likely fakes. When Kroll reached one auditor who had allegedly vetted nineteen of T.I.B.C.’s customers, to which hundreds of millions of dollars had been loaned, the auditor said that T.I.B.C. had never been his client—and that his signature and stamp had been forged. In a detailed report, Kroll claimed that Stewart and Sanea had “set up and developed a portfolio of fake customer loans,” with Stewart acting as the “day-to-day manager of the loan book” and helping to prepare “false financial statements.”

Stewart, confined to Bahrain, spent his days golfing, swimming laps in the lagoon behind the Ritz-Carlton, and working on his memoirs. The first volume, “A Gentleman and a Player,” recounts the nearly five years he spent in England. It includes accounts of various romances. At one point, he observes, “Having sex in the back of a Morris Traveller parked by the Serpentine in Hyde Park is not the most comfortable thing in the world. But where there’s a will there’s a way.”

Stewart hired a lawyer and helped him draft an eighty-five-page complaint to the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling the travel ban against

him “illegal,” and contending that Hamza’s investigation had been prompted solely by an “internal family dispute.” The travel ban had deprived Stewart of “his most basic human rights,” the complaint went on, with Stewart being treated “as a non-Middle-Eastern infidel whose life can be indefinitely trodden upon without regard to due process.” In the complaint, Stewart denied any involvement with “documenting, assessing, underwriting, or gathering information” for the loan book.

On January 25, 2010, eight months after T.I.B.C. collapsed, Hamza brought Stewart in for questioning. Stewart felt uncharacteristically nervous; that morning at breakfast, he swallowed two Dogmatil sedatives, hoping that they would relax him. The interrogation lasted two days. Stewart insisted on his innocence and said, “As far as I know, all the loan applications were correct.” Suleiman al-Gosaibi, he said, had given Sanea “legal authorization to manage financial affairs” at the Money Exchange. Ultimately, it was a “family dispute.” And Stewart argued that T.I.B.C.’s implosion was primarily “the result of Lehman’s collapse” in the fall of 2008.

Hamza’s interrogation of Stewart focussed on charges of “knowingly benefitting from a crime,” “deception,” and forgery. Hamza issued a “renewable” seven-day prison sentence, with bail set at approximately twenty-six thousand dollars. Stewart raised the money within a few hours and avoided jail time. But

he was afraid. Speaking of Hamza, Stewart told me, “It was clear that the man knew absolutely nothing about banking or finance. He asked unsophisticated questions, and I knew that we were fucked. We were going to get railroaded by a kangaroo court.”

Stewart pleaded with the U.S. Embassy in Manama to pressure the Bahraini government into lifting the travel ban. His request was denied. A former American official there told me that Stewart’s claims against the Bahrainis struck him as “outlandish.”

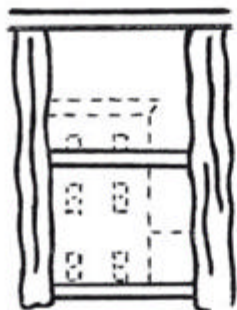
Meanwhile, in California, Stewart’s wife contacted her congressman, Henry Waxman. Waxman’s office refused to extend assistance, however, referring to a

letter from the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain that stated (incorrectly) that Stewart had been charged with money laundering and (correctly) that he was “not free to leave Bahrain.” Stewart, panicked, began looking for another way off the island. “I tried to work legally within the system, but there is no system,” he told me.

According to Stewart, he approached a former C.I.A. officer, who offered to smuggle him out of Bahrain. They agreed to terms, and late one night in May, 2010, Stewart says, he left his Manama apartment for the last time, carrying a backpack containing clothes, a phone, cash, and his passport. He told me that he met two Americans—one of them the former C.I.A. officer—in a dark, empty lot. They drove to a beach, then waded into the Gulf, where a thirty-four-foot cabin cruiser was idling offshore. He and the former C.I.A. officer climbed aboard, and were greeted by five men with “military experience.” Stewart then squeezed into a secret compartment, which was bolted shut. (He declined to provide the names of anyone on the boat who could corroborate his account.) The boat sped off, skirting the Saudi and Kuwaiti coasts, and two days later, Stewart said, they arrived at the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr. An Iraqi general there secured Stewart a visa. The next morning, Stewart flew from Basra to Amman, proceeded to London, and, a week later, arrived in Los Angeles.

In September, 2012, I visited Stewart’s office, in Santa Monica, five blocks from the beach and two floors above a Brazilian-jujitsu studio. He was sharing a loft space—brushed-concrete floors, exposed ductwork—with a movie-financing company. Stewart wore a gray polo shirt tucked into cream-colored slacks, and dark Top-Siders. He had gained weight in recent years, and, with his slightly pocked complexion, cinder-block jaw, and bulbous nose, he called to mind a retired Soviet bodybuilder.

He gave me a tour, pointing out Qashqai rugs from Iran and a framed concert poster from a 1970 Grand Funk Railroad show. “I have a wide-ranging, eclectic set of tastes,” he said. We paused before a pair of antique bookshelves. One contained the complete works of Shakespeare (“I’ve read almost all of them”), Conrad, and Charlotte Brontë. The other



held facsimile first editions of American classics. Stewart pulled “From Here to Eternity” off the shelf and declared, “I rate this as the second-best work of American literature, after ‘Huckleberry Finn.’”

Sitting at his desk, Stewart said that he was now pursuing literary projects. “I write reasonably well,” he said, despairing that most residents of Los Angeles were “semiliterate.” (He expressed similar condescension toward Arabs, describing them as “basically turbulent, ill-disciplined people.”) Stewart had recently completed a second volume of his memoirs, “An American Youth.” More volumes were forthcoming. “I’m consciously modelling this on Boswell,” he said.

The U.S. does not have an extradition treaty with Bahrain, so AHAB’s charges did not follow Stewart home. But, about nine months after Stewart returned to America, Eric Lewis, the attorney representing the Gosaibis, filed the lawsuit against him in California, alleging more than nine billion dollars in damages—the amount that Sanea, with Stewart’s assistance, was said to have misappropriated from AHAB.

During our conversation, Stewart characterized the allegations against him as “slanderous shit.” The Gosaibis “knew everything” Sanea was doing, he claimed—and, even if they didn’t, the responsibility was theirs, since they had given Sanea power of attorney: “They defaulted on their loans, and then they adopted this perjurious strategy to blame the whole thing on Maan.” Stewart called Lewis a “paid whore” of the Gosaibis. “To put it coarsely, what the al-Gosaibis and Eric Lewis have done is the equivalent of going to the police and saying, ‘I saw Glenn Stewart sodomizing a ten-year-old boy in the lavatory,’ ” he told me. “It’s going to cost me a lot of money, a lot of pain, I will be investigated, and it’s going to take some time before it’s proven that they’re liars and that they’ve done this solely for vindictive reasons.”

The Gosaibis’ feud with Sanea has been going on for nearly six years. Litigation has taken place in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other jurisdictions. In July, 2009, the Gosaibis sued Sanea in the Cayman Islands, the site of some offshore companies es-



“Full disclosure—I really need this hug.”

tablished by Sanea. A judge there imposed a two-and-a-half-billion-dollar freeze order against Sanea’s assets. In court filings, Sanea has depicted the Gosaibis’ campaign to “apply illegitimate pressure on me to pay AHAB’s legitimate debts” as “indefensible and abusive,” and has said, “I am absolutely sure that I have done nothing wrong”; the loan-book allegations, he has said, are “without any justification,” and he has “categorically” denied participating in any forgery. Confirming that fraud has taken place is not the same as confirming who orchestrated it, and no court has declared Sanea the author of T.I.B.C.’s fictional loans. (Sanea refused numerous requests to comment for this article, and his attorneys in London declined repeatedly to be interviewed about the authenticity of the loan book.)

Dozens of creditor banks also filed suits against AHAB. The banks argued that the Gosaibis, as the owners of T.I.B.C. and the Money Exchange, were obliged to cover their debts. In 2011, five banks collectively went to trial against the Gosaibis in the U.K. over AHAB debt. The Gosaibis denied any responsibility, stating that they did not know about the extent of Sanea’s activities—or even of the existence of T.I.B.C. In court, however, documents emerged that indicated at least some family awareness of his rampant borrowing—including letters

from Saud al-Gosaibi to Sanea, and AHAB audit reports making references to T.I.B.C. The Gosaibis were either not telling the truth or exaggerating their ignorance of T.I.B.C.’s activities. (Billions of dollars generated by the loan book flowed through a Bank of America account belonging to the Gosaibis.)

The Gosaibis, seeing their line of defense collapse, withdrew from the case, and the judge ordered them to pay two hundred and fifty million dollars in liabilities. In several dozen other court proceedings, judges have rejected the Gosaibis’ claim that they are not liable for the debts because their in-law stole from them. Although a court in Bahrain has supported the Gosaibis’ contention that T.I.B.C. documents contained forgeries of Suleiman’s signatures, other courts have not. Sanea’s lawyers say that “AHAB’s allegations have been given no credence by any of at least sixty-three courts or tribunals worldwide.”

Stewart cited such proceedings as proof that he had committed no crime. Yet even in the U.K. case, where the bank plaintiffs and the Gosaibis differed on matters of knowledge and responsibility, no one defended the integrity of the loans that had been made. The Money Exchange’s audit reports, a lawyer for one of the five banks said, “weren’t worth the paper they were written on.”

Last spring, Trowers & Hamlin, a

law firm assigned by the Bahraini government to take administrative control of T.I.B.C. and recover lost assets, filed a \$1.9-billion lawsuit against AHAB. In a press release, Abdullah Mutawi, a partner at the firm, announced that a recent court order had forced AHAB to share its banking records, permitting a “precise mapping of the flow of funds.” It turned out that AHAB was T.I.B.C.’s biggest debtor, and that billions of dollars had moved from T.I.B.C. into a Gosaibi-owned account—making, Mutawi argued, the family legally responsible for the bank’s debt. Nevertheless, Mutawi declared that a “painstaking forensic analysis” of T.I.B.C. had left no doubt that the loan book had been “created and operated” by “fraudulent means.”

After twenty-seven years in the Gulf, Stewart was ready to settle back into American life. He tried to develop television projects, including a reality show about Mississippi riverboat pilots, and an adaptation of a Swedish game show. He earned credit as an executive producer on “Nothing Left to Fear,” a film whose main backer was Slash, the former guitarist of Guns N’ Roses. (According to the Web site Box Office Mojo, the film grossed less than eight thousand dollars domestically.) Stewart became a partner in a natural-gas exploration venture in Pennsylvania, and

bought a hundred and ten single-family homes in Detroit, which are being renovated for resale. “I am very bullish on Detroit,” he told me.

He produced a new version of “The City Club,” his musical, at the Minetta Lane Theatre, in Greenwich Village. A crew member told me that Stewart “made it clear he was pumping money into the show.” But the director accused Stewart of micromanaging rehearsals, and they fell out. The show closed after two weeks. A reviewer from Backstage.com applauded the show’s pleasant music, even if the songs were “draped around an unconvincing noir potboiler from book writer Glenn M. Stewart.”

Shortly after Stewart returned to California, he learned that Bahraini officials were planning to attend a reception, hosted by the Bahrain Association of Banks, at the Mandarin Oriental, in Washington, D.C. On the night of the event, in October, 2010, Stewart entered the ballroom at the Mandarin “bold as brass, like I belonged there.” He took a drink from a passing tray and made his way toward Rasheed Mohammad Al Maraj, the governor of Bahrain’s central bank. Robert Ainey, the head of the banking association, recognized Stewart, hurried to check the guest list, and confirmed that Stewart was crashing the party.

Stewart approached Maraj and shook his hand. “We should talk,” he said.

Maraj looked at him scornfully and replied, “I don’t want to talk to you.”

The confrontation, though brief, satisfied Stewart, and he left proudly. “I wanted to assert my rights as a free man, not one of their semi-slaves,” he told me. “I had absolutely no rights in Bahrain!” When the bankers’ association hosted its reception in Washington the next year, Ainey distributed photographs of Stewart to the hotel’s security guards and authorized them to block him from entering.

Meanwhile, preparations for the California case against Stewart moved ahead. In 2013, both sides began sharing discovery materials and preparing to depose witnesses. In a counter-complaint, Stewart’s lawyers said that AHAB “will certainly not be able to prove that Stewart acted without authority.” They denied that Stewart “directed or supervised any ‘scheme,’” and further argued that Stewart’s “belief in Al Sanea’s authority was reasonable and justified,” because “multiple reliable sources” had assured him that Sanea had power of attorney. The defense called two women from the Gosaibi family for deposition. Stewart figured that the women would have little knowledge of AHAB’s operations but assumed that the Gosaibis would be disinclined to submit them to the indignity of a legal proceeding. “This was my idea—because I have the cultural context,” Stewart told me.

In April, 2013, the California judge declared that there was a “reasonable possibility” that Stewart “will prevail,” citing a judge in the Cayman proceedings, who said that Sanea’s “substantial borrowing . . . may well have been undertaken with either the express or implied knowledge and authority of the AHAB Partners.” The Gosaibis dropped their case. Perhaps to save face, they agreed to walk away under one condition: that Stewart consent to a lengthy interview about Sanea’s role. The interview took place the next month, and although neither side would discuss details on the record, Stewart told me that it was not especially probing. “We feel vindicated by this settlement,” Haig Kalbian, a lawyer representing Stewart, was quoted as saying in *The National*, an Abu Dhabi newspaper. “This case should never have been brought against Glenn Stewart. The fact that the other



side has walked away from the case speaks volumes.”

Lewis told me that the Gosaibis had decided to quit their pursuit of Stewart in order to focus on reclaiming billions from Sanea, and said, “A principal purpose of the lawsuit against Stewart was to obtain information against Maan al-Sanea.” Lewis’s legal campaign has encountered setbacks on other fronts: in April, 2014, the public prosecutor of Bahrain dismissed AHAB’s complaint against Sanea, because the Gosaibis had failed to produce purported loan-book victims in court. And no judge has ratified Lewis’s contention that T.I.B.C. was a Ponzi scheme, although no court has yet ruled on the integrity of the loan book. The Gosaibis are currently pursuing two criminal lawsuits in Saudi Arabia, where Sanea continues to live in his mansion in Khobar. And last April the family won two procedural appeals against Sanea in the Cayman Islands, clearing the way for a trial, in 2016, that probes the loan book’s authenticity. Stewart could be called to testify.

Six years after T.I.B.C.’s collapse, the Gosaibis, Sanea, and Bahrain’s banking sector are still dealing with its ramifications. The Gosaibis were forced to sell their Pepsi facility, and the Saudi government has banned them from travelling abroad. (Sanea is also forbidden to leave the Kingdom.) Dubai has decisively surpassed Manama as the preferred financial destination in the Gulf. Moreover, as Stewart put it, “We destroyed name-lending in the region.” Tariq Ali, the banker, said, “Now banks don’t want to do name-lending—and it’s because of this.” He went on, “Name-lending should have stopped on its own, but this was the awakening.”

Stewart, apart from a couple of million dollars spent on legal fees, has more or less left the scandal behind. Recently, the public prosecutor in Bahrain dropped the charges against him. Other legal proceedings involving Stewart are continuing in Bahrain, but, without the threat of extradition, he is free to enjoy his riches. Still, he points out that he will never have the chance to exonerate himself in court—to explain why all the testimony suggesting that he had perpetrated fraud was misinformed, why all the documents that had seemed so

damning had been misinterpreted, and why Kroll’s blunt allegations about “a portfolio of fake loan customers” were misplaced.

Several months before Stewart made the deal with the Gosaibis, he gave me his version of the truth. We met for lunch at an English pub in Philadelphia; he was in town for the Army-Navy football game. We sat upstairs, in a room whose hunter-green wallpaper featured rustic portraits of foxes being pursued by hounds.

All along, Stewart had insisted that the loan documents he reviewed were clean. He had told me, “Anything I signed off on, there was a complete credit file with all the necessary K.Y.C.”—know-your-customer—“documentation, pre-signed by the credit applicant and pre-signed by the credit department at T.I.B.C.”

After we ordered rabbit pies, I retrieved from my backpack some T.I.B.C. loan applications that had been leaked to Ernst & Young. Each one showed two signatures. Stewart’s name was next to the words “Recommended By.” The other signature was that of T.I.B.C.’s credit manager. But the black line that followed the words “Originated By” was blank; a Post-it note, bearing the words “Sign Here,” was affixed to the spot, indicating that the documents originated not with a credit applicant in Saudi Arabia but, rather, at T.I.B.C.’s offices in Bahrain. I told Stewart that it seemed unusual for a bank to anticipate a customer’s need for a loan—and to fill out all the paperwork in advance.

“Look, they just put this stuff in front of me,” he said, shrugging.

I suggested that he knew that there were sham customers in T.I.B.C.’s loan book, and that T.I.B.C. had defrauded other banks.

“The banks were not defrauded,” Stewart said, raising his voice. “They knew the risk they were taking.”

“They didn’t know the loan book was fake,” I said.

“I didn’t know the loan book was fake,” he said.

Several months later, when I asked him whether he found it odd that so many loans were going to employees of Maan al-Sanea, he told me, “Look, I’m not stupid. I assumed all the companies were affiliated with Maan.... But I as-

sumed, based on the documentation, that they were all *legitimate* companies.” Last month, he said that now, with hindsight, he could see that the loans were not genuine. But, he added, “I absolutely did not know that these funds were not being disbursed. Hand on heart, I swear.” We spoke a final time on March 29th. Stewart told me that to focus on the loan book was “a red herring” while also claiming that he had been “tricked, big time.” He said, “I was kept in the dark, and now Maan has dropped me in the shit.”

In an earlier conversation, I had asked him if he had learned any lessons from his years in Bahrain. “Never do business with princes or kings,” he said, laughing. He asked me if I had ever worked in the Middle East. I shook my head. “Things do not work in the same way down there as they do in the West,” he said. “It’s a different cultural environment that I know nothing about and have no way of penetrating. I’m just the hired help, way down the fucking food chain.” This was a departure from the language on Stewart’s Web site, in which he attests to his involvement in “some of the most significant transactions in Middle Eastern and Islamic finance,” providing him with “a unique insight into both the business and cultural aspects of this region.”

Another time, Stewart and I met for lunch on the patio at the Balboa Bay Club and Resort, in Newport Beach, where Stewart was a member. (Not long ago, he sold his Pacific Palisades home to pay for legal expenses, and is now renting a house in Huntington Beach.) I asked him if he missed life in the Gulf. “That’s why I studied Arabic in the first place,” he said. “I didn’t want to have an orthodox career. I wanted to have adventures. I wanted to go abroad and see the world. The trouble is that living in the Middle East is always a double-edged sword. When it’s going well, it’s just a fascinating place. When it’s going against you, you don’t have any recourse.” He went on, “One of the things about the United States I find very difficult is that there’s no ability to negotiate with the rules and regulations. Even things that are not necessarily sensible rules, you can’t negotiate.” He paused and said, “In the Middle East, you can negotiate anything.” ♦

THE PRICE OF A LIFE

What's the right way to compensate someone for decades of lost freedom?

BY ARIEL LEVY

As teen-agers on Long Island, John Restivo and Marge Neidecker spent hours in her blue Road Runner, cruising around the towns where Queens gives way to Nassau County. “We did a lot of drag racing,” Neidecker remembered. “I owned a souped-up car—so did everybody back in the seventies.” She had long, straight blond hair parted down the middle, like Joni Mitchell’s. Restivo was a tall, gangly guy; his nickname in the neighborhood was Wimpy. Sometimes they cut class at Lynbrook High School and rode around together, smoking cigarettes and listening to Bob Dylan. They loved his song “Hurricane,” and sang along as they drove: “Here comes the story of the Hurricane/ the man the authorities came to blame/ for something that he never done.” It seemed like a metaphor for all the injustices of adolescence.

After high school, they went their separate ways. In Neidecker’s yearbook, Restivo wrote, “Best of luck with the future.” She married at nineteen. He went to work for his father, a retired police officer, at the family’s moving-and-storage company. The Restivos were a close family: every Sunday they had dinner together, with as many as twenty relatives at the table.

When Restivo was twenty-four, his father died, of a heart attack. A year later, his girlfriend gave birth to their son. Suddenly, Restivo was the father of an infant and the oldest of three brothers in a business that had relied heavily on the family patriarch. He was overwhelmed, always tense. One day in March, 1985, he was driving in Ocean-side, about to make a left onto Rockaway Avenue, to check on some of the company’s trucks. Three unmarked cars drove up next to him. The men inside said that they were cops, and told Restivo to pull over to the curb.

He was taken to the county-police headquarters, in Mineola, where Joseph

Volpe, a beefy detective with bushy eyebrows, told him that they were investigating a homicide. Restivo’s first thought was that his girlfriend and their new baby had been murdered. But that wasn’t it. The body of a sixteen-year-old named Theresa Fusco had been found in the woods near the Hot Skates roller rink, where she’d worked at the snack bar; she had been raped, and strangled with a rope. Though Restivo had never met the victim and had no criminal record, it became clear that he was a suspect. One of the detectives grabbed him by the throat, he recalled recently. “He starts screaming, right in my face, ‘Is this how you killed her?’ And I’m, like, ‘This is *insane*.’” They kept him at the station for twenty hours, during which he was not allowed to rest or eat or call his girlfriend and let her know where he was. Restivo remembers that when he said he had a right to a lawyer, Volpe told him, “This is un-America: you have no rights here.” Then Volpe’s partner, Robert Dempsey, hit him in the face.

Restivo had grown up thinking of the police as good guys—his father had spent twenty years on the Nassau County force—and he was stunned by his treatment. As soon as he was released, he went to see a lawyer, who took photographs of his bruises and filed a complaint against the detectives. (Dempsey denied hitting Restivo.) But the police did not relinquish the case. “It’s quite possible that the fact that he called a lawyer right away made them think that he was guilty,” Anna Benvenuti Hoffmann, one of Restivo’s current lawyers, said. “Anything is a sign that you’re guilty, once they get a feeling that they don’t like something about somebody.”

Restivo’s phones were tapped. His home was bugged. “Everywhere I went, they started following me around,” he said. “I’m trying to continue running a business, and if I go to somebody’s house



In 1985, police on Long Island arrested John



Restivo in connection with a rape and murder. He remembers a detective telling him, "This is un-America: you have no rights here."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTAAN FELBER

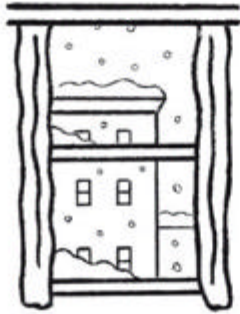
to do an estimate or a moving job, I'm afraid the cops are going to show up. Anybody I associated with, they're starting to snatch off the street—and they're not just bringing them in for a half-hour chat." On the night of the crime, Restivo had been in Wantagh, sanding floors at his new house with a friend; the police brought the friend in and questioned him for ten hours. "They told me, 'We're going to turn your life into an effing nightmare,'" Restivo said. "And we're going to turn your brother's life into an effing nightmare. We'll turn your mother's life into a nightmare. We'll turn your son's life into a nightmare.' And they did."

There was a mounting sense of menace in Lynbrook and Oceanside at the time: Theresa Fusco was not the only teenage girl to disappear from the area. Her friend Kelly Morrissey, a fifteen-year-old with winged hair and a giddy grin, had vanished the previous June; she was last seen on her way to the Captain Video arcade. The police had listed Morrissey as a runaway, though before she went missing she had laid out an outfit for the next day on her bed. They likewise assumed that Fusco had fled in protest after she was fired from Hot Skates, but her mother, Connie Napoli, insisted that her daughter had been abducted. "Police should trust a mother's feelings," Napoli said at the time. "It is so frustrating knowing your child is somewhere needing help, and you don't know where to go." When some children found Fusco's naked body covered with leaves in the woods by the railroad tracks, people in the neighborhood began to panic. Then, a few months later, a nineteen-year-old named Jacqueline Martarella disappeared in Oceanside on her way to Burger King. Her body was found on a golf course; like Fusco, she had apparently been raped and strangled. There was enormous pressure on the police to find a culprit.

Volpe was an experienced member of the Nassau County force, but this was his first case as the lead detective on a homicide. There was no DNA testing available at that time, so even though the police took vaginal swabs from Fusco to

ascertain that she'd been raped, they were unable to identify her assailant based on the semen they recovered. In January of 1985, after several months of investigation, Volpe heard that a local man—a veteran who suffered from P.T.S.D. and had been hospitalized for psychiatric illness—had been bragging that he knew who did it. He named John Restivo.

After the police brought Restivo in for questioning, Volpe began to build his case. During his interrogation, Restivo had mentioned an employee, a twenty-one-year-old named John Kogut. The police picked up Kogut after he had just finished a day of intense physical labor and then drunk a few beers and smoked a joint. Despite his insobriety, Kogut passed



a polygraph test in which he insisted that he knew nothing about the crime. But the police told him that he had failed, and interrogated him for eighteen hours—by the end of which he had given six distinct, contradictory confessions. The last one was handwritten by one of the detectives. Kogut signed it, and then, sitting before a video camera, confessed to the crime, hewing to the police's version of events: He had gone out with Restivo and his friend Dennis Halstead, a thirty-year-old father of five, who sometimes worked with them at the moving company. In Restivo's van, the three men had picked Fusco up from the street and taken her to a cemetery. There, among the headstones, Halstead and Restivo had raped her and then persuaded Kogut to strangle her with a rope.

Kogut recanted his confession almost immediately. Restivo's van had been up on blocks at his mother's house on the night of the crime, and, anyway, the three men had never ridden in it together—Kogut and Halstead couldn't stand each other. But it didn't matter. The police impounded Restivo's van, and on June 20, 1985, he and Halstead were arrested.

Dennis Halstead's son Jason said that, before his father was taken in, "I wanted to be with him all the time. He was my hero." When the police came to arrest Halstead, he and Jason were fishing off the Woodmere docks; Jason, who

was twelve, had gone to check the lines. "When I turned back to yell at my dad we caught something, I saw him talking to two men in suits with police surrounding him," Jason said. "All I heard him say was 'I can't believe you guys have the balls to do this.'" Dennis Halstead described the moment when Volpe approached him. "Jason looked at me," he said. "I told him that everything would be O.K. And I told them, 'Please don't cuff me in front of my son.'"

Restivo was less self-possessed. When he was taken to jail, he said, "I was frightened of being sexually assaulted; I was frightened of being assaulted physically"—which he was, half a dozen times. "I was scared to death." Bail was set at seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and he didn't have the money, so he remained in jail for more than a year awaiting trial. "I can still remember that cell door clanging shut behind me," he said. His lawyer warned him not to interact with anyone, because anything he said might be used against him. "Dudes would come tell me they'd be taken from the bullpen and brought up to the D.A.'s office, and they were told, 'Listen, you've got this guy Restivo on your gallery. You tell us that he confessed to you, you're out of there.'" He felt increasingly doomed. But some part of him believed this couldn't continue much longer, that any day he would have his old life back.

During that time, Restivo's girlfriend wrote him letters in the voice of their infant son: "I really miss you, Daddy. But you got to hang in there. We will clear up this whole mess. When you feel depressed, just think of coming home and playing with me." By the time Restivo went to trial, in October, 1986, he had lost thirty pounds.

The prosecution's case rested heavily on Volpe's report to the district attorney, which noted a significant piece of evidence recovered from Restivo's van: two strands of hair found on the floor which appeared to have come from Fusco's head. Restivo's lawyer argued that the police had submitted tainted evidence, but the prosecution was unfazed. (Fred Klein, the assistant district attorney assigned to the case, described Volpe to me as "a wonderful detective—one of the most tenacious, professional people I have ever worked with.") Several jailhouse informants claimed to have heard Restivo

bragging about raping the girl, and a friend recalled hearing him say, "She probably deserved it." On the stand, Restivo disavowed the comment, saying, "It was a very insensitive remark, but I didn't mean anything by it." Klein held up a photograph of Fusco's body and yelled in Restivo's face, "What did she deserve?"

The men were found guilty. Restivo remembers hearing his mother, Frida, screaming in the back of the courtroom as the judge announced the verdict. He was sentenced to thirty-three years to life. Before he was led away in handcuffs, he read aloud an eighteen-page letter. "Each defendant in this case was offered a deal by the D.A. I myself was offered three to nine to 'coöperate.' But I have no knowledge of this crime and would not lie to try to protect myself," he said. "If I must spend the rest of my life in prison for something I didn't do, at least I'll be able to sleep at night."

"I haven't slept through the night in thirty years," Restivo said one afternoon, sitting on his back deck, near the Indian River Lagoon, in central Florida. It was a few days before New Year's, and there were still Christmas bulbs shining in the palm fronds throughout the neighborhood. Restivo has lived there, in a little blue house, since he was released from prison, in 2003. He and Dennis Halstead were exonerated, with the help of DNA evidence, after serving eighteen years.

Restivo was wearing a T-shirt that said "What a Long Strange Trip It's Been." He is starting to go bald, and he has a silver mustache and dark purple circles under his eyes. In prison, he was often awakened by the sounds of other inmates fighting, or of rats skittering across the floor of his cell. Now he has terrible nightmares, and gets about three hours of sleep a night. Prison was "like a war zone," he said. "Any day could be your day. With the prison gangs, to become a member in good standing you've got to go up to someone and"—he mimed slicing his cheek—"hit 'em with a razor. You feel—or, at least, I did—safest locked in your own cell." He went back and forth between Green Haven prison and Clinton, not registering much difference. "It doesn't matter where you are," Restivo said. "If you're going to be victimized, you're going to be vic-

timized." Restivo survived because he's big, and because he kept to himself.

Even before he was convicted, he started writing letters, "to anybody, any name I could come up with," pleading his innocence, asking for help. In prison, he got a job in the law library, so that he could research his case. "I had a typewriter in my cell that had a seven-thousand-character memory," he said. "When I understood what the enemy had access to—I mean, I didn't know there was Lexis and all these things! They had spell check. I was using a dictionary."

In 1985, when he went in, Restivo was a frightened twenty-six-year-old. When he was released, he was forty-four: middle-aged, with no real résumé, severe P.T.S.D., and a sense of bafflement about "why everybody was walking around holding their heads like they had an earache." (Restivo was incarcerated before the advent of the cell phone.) Soon after his release, he went to Florida to help his old friend Marge Neidecker rebuild her house, after the collapse of her marriage. He never left.

Restivo and Neidecker live modestly, on the salary from her job at the local post office. In 2010, he received a \$2.2-million settlement from the State of New York, but much of that went to lawyers and to his mother, who for two decades had spent everything she could spare on his case, at one point putting

up her house as bond. Restivo tries to live as if that settlement were the last money he will ever have. "When they handed me that check, I'm not thinking, Ah, I'm rich!" he said. "I'm not eligible for Medicaid. I'm not eligible for Social Security. I never put money in a 401(k). That money has to last me forever."

But in April, 2014, a jury in Islip awarded Restivo eighteen million dollars in damages—effectively, a million for each year of his imprisonment. Nassau County is appealing the ruling, so the money will likely take years to materialize, if it comes at all. "I've been through too much in this world to think anything's a given," Restivo said. "I can't start living off that money. Then I put myself in a hole and I'm screwed for the rest of my life." His expenses are minimal: "I could live on the beach." But he was concerned about his mother. He had just returned from spending several months repairing her house in Lynbrook, and she was in poor health. "These are my wishes—to know that she's taken care of," he said.

Restivo often worries about other people, even people he barely knows. He doesn't say goodbye before he hangs up the phone; he says, "Stay out of trouble." When I went to see him, he was concerned that I'd get lost in the orange groves on the way to his house. In prison, he trained to become a registered



THE BOURNE ETERNITY

H.I.V. counsellor and volunteered in the psychiatric unit. “All of these guys had different issues, and they couldn’t function in the general population,” Restivo said. “I would go up there three or four days a week and teach them basic math, basic reading skills. Sometimes basic life skills.” He worries about Dennis Halstead’s children, who Jason Halstead said have come to think of him as “a second father.”

Restivo also worries about his own son, whom he has not seen since 1986. His girlfriend brought the baby to visit him in jail, and told Restivo that she had a new boyfriend and was moving out of state. “That was the last time I seen the kid,” Restivo said. In 1988, she asked him to sign away his paternal rights, so that her husband could adopt the baby. Restivo considered the options. The boy could grow up with a man who he thought was his father, or he could grow up believing that his real father was in prison for no reason—or, worse, that he was a murderer. He sent a letter assenting to the adoption, and added a request: “You can do me one thing, send me a photo of him.”

At the trial for damages last year, Marge Neidecker testified that she hears Restivo cry whenever he takes a shower, and that he showers three or four times a day.

One of the earliest arguments for financial compensation for the wrongly incarcerated came in 1932, from the Yale law professor Edwin Borchard. In an influential book called “Convicting the Innocent: Sixty-five Actual Errors of Criminal Justice,” Borchard wrote, “When it is discovered after conviction that the wrong man was condemned, the least the State can do to right this essentially irreparable injury is to reimburse the innocent victim, by an appropriate indemnity for the loss and damage suffered.” He noted, “European countries have long recognized that such indemnity is a public obligation.” But it would be many years before the United States began puzzling through what constituted an “appropriate indemnity.” It wasn’t until the first DNA exoneration, in 1989, that most states began to seriously consider compensation.

There is still no consensus about the

value of lost time. Missouri gives exonerees fifty dollars a day for time served, California twice that much. Massachusetts caps total compensation at half a million dollars. In Maine, the limit is three hundred thousand; in Florida, it’s two million. The variation is largely arbitrary. “If there’s a logic to it, I haven’t seen it,” Robert J. Norris, a researcher at SUNY Albany who has studied compensation statutes, told me. In Wisconsin, no matter how long an exoneree has served, the state will pay no more than twenty-five thousand dollars—the same figure that its legislators established in 1979. “They just never changed it,” Norris said. “They even amended their statute in 1987, but they didn’t change the amount.” Most states levy taxes on payment. Twenty states have no compensation statutes at all.

Fifteen hundred and seventy-five people have been exonerated in the U.S. The best off are those whom Brandon

USER

The only Novacell was in the kitchen so I hesitated before ambling down the hall and glancing in our Bean to check that Yip was Uberliving®, ironing Ken’s blouses

and co-hosting a Meet-and-Greet for Bebop enthusiasts, a form of Original Music she’d quite recently Addicted to. I slipped in and flicked the MoodChute, whispered the visor’s

name onto the Eardrive and hollowed at his off-site. Over-all demazing: semi-helpful; size, age, general appearance not dissimilar to mine though he was just 28 per cent

Blasian and had won Freestyle Bronze in 4-6-Summer on the PetSafe moon of the Eternal Insurance System®. I de-acked the stream and saw his temples were graying,

indicating wilting, and that he could do with a TreatWeek in a JumpCoat® to vigo-rate the T’s. Underwhelmed when memflicking to find it 10-80 since he’d stoked. As he coded

the Sunrise Raisinana Patch®, allowing a fourteen-mil boost in the laterals to stave off the worst, I impressed taking a QuantiCation® with his extended, and why not try

the Salted Leaps on the Rio Seven islets. Since I always liked to jellifish. To jellifish or sit in a SnipThrone®, motionless. Or the back cell of a Hydro, say. Unformatted for that instant.

—Nick Laird

Garrett, a professor at the University of Virginia School of Law who has written extensively on post-conviction litigation, describes as “the ones that win the tort lottery.” These are exonerees who seek compensation through the courts, arguing that their fundamental civil rights were violated by the police or by prosecutors. (The same legal principle is at issue in federal suits brought by people who have been shot by the police.) In such cases, the potential damages are unlimited. But the standard of proof is high. “Police officers have qualified immunity,” Garrett told me. “They can violate your constitutional rights—reasonably but not egregiously.”

One of the major obstacles to filing these suits is that plaintiffs don’t have access to law-enforcement records—which typically contain the best evidence of misconduct. A federal civil-rights suit, Garrett said, provides “the Mercedes-Benz of discovery: seven-hour

depositions with the key witnesses, all the police files, all the prosecutor's files." But that material can be obtained only after a suit has been launched. "It's a Catch-22," Garrett continued. "You can't file a lawsuit without evidence to support your claim, and you can't necessarily get at that evidence without the kind of discovery available to you only from a federal civil-rights case. One of the hardest things I had to do in practice is explain to an exoneree why we can't file."

In 1988, a year into his sentence, Restivo read in the law library about a case in which a felon was convicted on the basis of DNA evidence. "I figured, if they're doing this to convict somebody, they're going to have to do this to let me out," he said. At his urging, his lawyer filed a motion requesting DNA testing on the vaginal swabs from the original investigation. That motion was denied, and Restivo's lawyer had to petition for another five years before it was granted. "We had DNA tests done in '93, '94, and '95, by three different labs," Restivo said. "The first test was inconclusive; the second and third tests excluded all three of us." But it wasn't enough. "They argued in court that these tests weren't reliable," he told me, his voice rising. "Wait a minute—it would be a billion-to-one shot that *both* of these tests were wrong!" Nassau County argued that the swabs had been partially consumed by previous serological tests and that the incriminating DNA could have been removed.

As DNA testing began to draw attention to the incidence of wrongful conviction in the United States—which has been estimated at as high as five per cent—an "innocence movement" coalesced, devoted to uncovering its causes and freeing its victims. In 1992, the attorneys Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld founded the Innocence Project, the most prominent legal organization devoted to DNA exoneration. The tests revealed deep flaws in a variety of law-enforcement practices and assumptions—mistaken eyewitness identification, for instance, has been shown to contribute to seventy per cent of wrongful convictions. (At the time, Scheck told me that the way police lineups were conducted would one day be considered as reliable as witch trials.) In about half of the three hun-

dred and twenty-nine DNA-exoneration cases since then, improper forensics have played a role; twenty-seven per cent have involved false confessions, and fifteen per cent have involved unreliable informants. All these factors were at play in the convictions of Restivo, Halstead, and Kogut.

In 2002, the Innocence Project assigned a young lawyer named Nina Morrison to Restivo's case, and, after a year of work, she made the decisive breakthrough. It happened by accident, one afternoon when Morrison was visiting the police department in Mineola. "I had gone with a couple lawyers to look at crime-scene photographs," she said. "And then, as we're going through the boxes, the prosecutor and I pulled out an envelope, and it's marked 'vaginal swabs.' And you're, like, *Oh—look at that.*" In the envelope was an intact swab, the final piece of evidence that they needed to have the original convictions vacated. On June 11, 2003, the three men were released from prison.

Klein, the prosecutor in the initial trial, told me, "The first feeling is, there must be something wrong with the test—it can't be. These people were properly convicted. At that point, it becomes: What did we miss? What other evidence is there?" Kogut was forced to go back to trial, largely because he had confessed, and in court Nassau County's case began to look suspicious. DNA testing confirmed that the strands of hair Detective Volpe claimed to have discovered in Restivo's van belonged to Theresa Fusco. But they displayed a marker of decomposition called "postmortem root banding," which occurs only many hours after death, and forensic evidence showed that Fusco's body had been left in the woods soon after she was murdered. What's more, the hairs were pristine, free of the debris and the damage from trampling that marked other stray hairs found in Restivo's van. The judge concluded that they must have come from elsewhere, perhaps from the autopsy; apparently the police had commingled them—accidentally or deliberately—with hairs from the van. On December 21, 2005, Kogut was acquitted.

Kogut's trial had stretched on for two years, while Restivo worried constantly that he, too, would be retried. "If a police officer drove down the street for any

reason, he called me in a panic that they were canvassing his neighborhood and somebody was going to fabricate a statement and say that he admitted to murder," Morrison said. "It's not atypical for clients to have irrational fears that people are following them, tapping their phones, after their release. In John's case, I couldn't tell him that it wasn't true, because they had done it the first time." After Kogut was acquitted, the prosecution declined to retry Halstead and Restivo. "Once the case was really over, he was a lot more free—legally and mentally," Morrison said.

But the case remained the focus of Restivo's life. "If I wasn't reading documents, if I was just laying back keeping my fingers crossed, it'd be different," he said. "But my mind is always going." In 2007, he sued the State of New York, and settled out of court for \$2.2 million. Along with Kogut and Halstead, he also filed a federal civil-rights suit against Nassau County. Given access to the police files, Restivo learned how Volpe had built the case against him. In order to open a wiretap on Restivo's phone, Volpe had reported that the hairs belonged to Fusco before a lab had time to analyze them, and had claimed that there was "possible human blood" in the van, even though a serologist told him that there was none. Restivo also learned that Volpe had abandoned a promising lead in order to focus on him. The night that Fusco was last seen, wearing a pair of striped jeans, a tan Oldsmobile went missing, less than a mile away. A week later, the car was found, with the windshield smashed and the license plates changed. After Fusco's body was discovered, the car's owner heard about the case on the news. He went to the police and told them that he had noticed a pair of unfamiliar striped jeans wadded under the passenger seat, and that a length of rope was missing from the vehicle. Volpe searched the car and took statements from witnesses. But he did not mention the car or the striped jeans or the rope in his report to the district attorney's office.

Fred Klein, who was an assistant district attorney for twenty-seven years and is now a professor at Hofstra Law School, said that the idea that the police had manipulated the evidence "intentionally would just be beyond my comprehension." The jury was similarly skeptical. In

2012, Restivo and the other men lost their case, and found themselves vilified again. “Our police department has been vindicated,” the Nassau County district attorney, John Ciampoli, announced at a press conference afterward. Even though the three had been exonerated, Ciampoli insisted that they were “criminals,” who were somehow “responsible for what happened to Theresa Fusco.” He concluded that they had “been denied a chance to turn what, in my opinion, is a heinous crime into a payday that would cripple Nassau County.”

Compensation is intended in part as a deterrent: a municipality that has to pay heavily for police or prosecutorial misconduct ought to be less likely to allow it to happen again. But it is taxpayers, not police or prosecutors, who bear the costs of litigation and compensation. Prosecutors enjoy almost total immunity in cases of misconduct, even if they deliberately withhold exculpatory evidence from a jury. A 2011 Supreme Court ruling also made it virtually impossible to sue a prosecutor’s office for such violations. And, unless there is a civil-rights trial, there is no examination of the police practices that contributed to a wrongful conviction: it is seen simply as collateral damage in the fight against crime. (North Carolina is the only state with an alternative; in 2006, it set up the Innocence Inquiry Commission to review claims of innocence outside the appellate-court process.) Klein pointed out that prosecutors in many states are already bound by ethics statutes. But, he added, “practically speaking, most prosecutors don’t spend too much time worrying about that. They assume that the police did their job.”

The other reason for awarding money is, of course, to compensate for a harm committed by the state. Some of that harm is purely financial: a person who has spent decades in prison, rather than developing a career, can emerge at forty-five and find herself eligible for the same jobs that she was eligible for at twenty-two. “I fill out applications for the dollar store, for CVS,” an exoneree named Cathy Watkins told me recently. Watkins spent eighteen years in prison for the shooting of a cabdriver in the Bronx, which was later found to have been committed by members of a nar-

cotics-trafficking gang called Sex Money Murder. She has been out for two and a half years, without any compensation, and she finds the process of seeking employment in a digital world confounding. “‘Upload your résumé online’—well, how do you *do* that?” she said. Had she been free to pursue a career, Watkins was sure she’d have built up a pension or savings. Instead, she is dependent on the generosity of others, a position that she finds compromising and unjust. “I worked for eighteen years!” she said. “Slave labor. It was prison—you *have* to do these things.”

People who spend many years in institutions tend to develop an overwhelming sense of helplessness. (This holds whether they are guilty or innocent—and, indeed, whether the institution is a prison or a mental hospital.) Watkins, like many other exonerees, told me, “I feel like a newborn baby.” She wished that she had some help navigating the world; the guilty, at least, had parole officers. “I want someone to take me by the hand and say, ‘O.K., Cathy, I’m going to show you how to do this. This was our mistake. Let us help you.’”

But many exonerated people are excluded from the system that supports other former convicts. “There are lots of programs designed for ex-offenders, to help them get past substance abuse, anger issues, to help them reintegrate and avoid recidivism,” Karen Daniel, the director of the Center on Wrongful Convictions, at Northwestern University’s School of Law, said. “There is nothing really like that in place for exonerees.” There are rarely enough of them in a given place to justify a program—and they may be loath to spend more time in settings that equate them with criminals. “But their needs are enormous,” Daniel continued. “They often have P.T.S.D. and need psychological services. They need to be shown how to use public transportation. There’s adjustment to family; there’s accepting that not everybody believes that you were wrongly convicted.”

Only five states provide exonerees with mental-health services or medical treatment—and, after years of substandard care, many former inmates have health problems. Only four offer job-placement assistance. Texas has what many regard as the most thoughtful statute. (Not coincidentally, it is also the

state with the most DNA exonerations.) A person who is exonerated in Texas has access to health insurance, free tuition at any state university, and a year of free counselling. He is eligible for a monthly annuity, as well as a payout of eighty thousand dollars for each year of incarceration, without having to file suit. So there is a relatively short period when he has no job, no home, no vehicle, no professional connections, and no money—and is thus dependent on his family for everything, as though he were a child.

“When you get out, it’s like you are new—you don’t know anything,” Richard Miles, who was incarcerated for fifteen years in Texas because of false eyewitness testimony, said. When he went in, he was nineteen years old and very naïve. “All I did growing up was go to church and school,” he told me. “Getting locked up in prison was a scary situation: they’re taking you someplace where you only read about it or see it on TV. You don’t really know how to respond to a place like that.” But when he came out, at thirty-four, he didn’t know how to respond to anything else. “You’ve been isolated, so a lot of the social skills that people rely on every day, you didn’t have those.”

Miles had received \$1.2 million in compensation, and I asked him if it had been sufficient. “Me, personally, it didn’t matter how much the amount was,” he said. “It didn’t give me back anything that I lost.”

One morning this fall, twenty exonerees wearing T-shirts that said “I didn’t do it” filled the headquarters of Centurion Ministries, in a drab office park in Princeton, New Jersey. Centurion is a tiny organization, with only ten people on staff, which seeks to free the wrongly incarcerated. One of its chief investigators, a rumpled eighty-two-year-old retired math teacher named Richard Hepburn, recently finished a case that required him to go to Montana fifty-five times and knock on doors. “How lucky am I—at my age!—to have this kind of excitement?” he said.

Centurion’s investigators spend an average of two decades on a case. They have succeeded fifty-three times. On a wall in the office, they keep a black felt board with the names of people whose cases they’re pursuing, and that morning

they were ceremonially removing Mark Schand's and Milton Scarborough's. The two men had served a combined sixty-three years in prison, and, later that afternoon, Centurion was throwing a "freedom party" for them, in the ballroom of the local Marriott hotel.

Schand, a fifty-year-old African-American, was convicted of a murder in Massachusetts, even though six witnesses—including his pregnant wife, Mia—placed him at her beauty salon, in Hartford, Connecticut, at the time. The assistant district attorney who prosecuted the case, Francis Bloom, has since been publicly censured for fabricating a confession and forging signatures in another case; he is now working as a personal-injury lawyer. "If these D.A.s were led away from their families like we're led away from ours, wrongful convictions would come to a screaming halt," Schand said.

Every Tuesday for twenty-seven years, Mia Schand drove five hours to see her husband in prison. At the ceremony that morning, she was alternately smiling and crying, standing with Schand's three sons, whom she had raised in his absence. During his decades away from the family, Schand said, "I just wanted to get back to my babies." After he took his name off the board, his children—little boys when Schand left, now tall, handsome young men—lifted him up on their shoulders, and everyone holed and clapped.

Scarborough, a seventy-five-year-old white man, sat stoop-shouldered and smiling in a wheelchair. When he was thirty-seven, he went on trial, along with two other men, for murdering a family in central Pennsylvania. He was convicted based on the testimony of three drug addicts, all of whom later said that investigators gave them leniency in exchange for false testimony. ("I remember telling the police, 'Tell me what you want me to say and I will say it,'" one admitted in an affidavit.) Scarborough, walking with a cane, approached the felt board with the help of his niece, who took him in after his release, in 2013. Together, they removed his name, letter by letter. "The prison system, I don't have much to say about it," Scarborough said to the group as their applause died down. "Except they don't feed you too good." Everyone laughed, and many of the men



"29 Across is classified, too, sir. They're all classified."

nodded. The state never formally acknowledged Scarborough's innocence; instead, it offered a deal, in which he agreed to drop his appeals in exchange for having his sentence commuted. As a result, he will never receive any compensation. He would be homeless if not for his niece.

Centurion worked on Restivo's case for nearly a decade before the Innocence Project got involved, and he is a fixture at their events now. Late that night, after the freedom party died down, people gathered at a bar. Restivo, who had changed into a burgundy T-shirt with a picture of a fish skeleton above the words "Fillet and Release," sat at a tall cocktail table, drinking vodka and talking about relationships with a fellow-exoneree named Frank O'Connell, who had served twenty-seven years for murder. "I missed out on companionship; I missed out on all that crap," O'Connell, a tall, blue-eyed man who was once a high-school football star, said. "I just meet you. Do I tell you I'm an exoneree? That I was in prison? Or do I want you to like me for *me*—as a father, as a hard worker? So I'm not going to tell you I was locked up. But I don't know about real estate. You bought homes and stuff.

You had a new car with financing—I can't tell you about that." He gestured at Restivo. "That's the kind of thing only we would feel. There's that gap in life of what we lost."

Restivo described another problem that the men shared: "I go in, I'm in my twenties. I come out, I'm forty-four, but I'm still looking at girls who are twenty-six!" I suggested that he had that in common with most forty-four-year-old men, whether or not they'd been imprisoned. The exonerees all insisted that it was different. O'Connell, who is fifty-seven, complained that "most of the women my age, they've had their fun," and were only looking for a husband. But he didn't love the alternative: "When I'm single and I'm alone, I feel isolated—I feel like I'm in the hole! I got a TV, I got a phone, but I'm in the hole!"

Since being released, in 2012, O'Connell has been preparing a civil-rights suit against Los Angeles County. "I made it clear: we're not playing the two-, three-million-dollar game," he said. "I will accept twelve million with a public apology, or fourteen million with a private apology to me and my family, or eighteen million with no apology whatsoever. Otherwise, we're going to

trial.” For Los Angeles County to acknowledge that O’Connell was framed for murder would be worth six million dollars, then. “It’s not about the money. It’s the *spanking*,” he said. “I want them to take responsibility. I have to take responsibility if I speed in my car. What’s the difference? If they would say, ‘I was wrong, and I’m sorry,’ I would say, ‘I forgive you.’”

Even as O’Connell specified what he wanted in the way of recompense, his tone was laid-back, Californian. (He’d had a breakthrough while he was in prison, he said, after reading the work of the self-help author Eckhart Tolle.) “We learn when we’re in there that all that anger does no good,” O’Connell said. “You can’t change what happened to you. You understand, hey, they’re dirty. It’s not just the cops. The judges are; the D.A.s are. It’s a game.”

After the failed federal suit, in 2012, Restivo and Halstead went to court again, this time without Kogut and the burden of his false confession. It was a two-part trial. First, they had to establish that Nassau County was liable, which required proving that the police had knowingly deprived them of the right to a fair trial. “You have to re-litigate your innocence,” as the law professor Brandon Garrett put it. Restivo sat through all the old allegations again. “The deposition they put me through was over two days, for fourteen hours,” he said. “These people attacked me and

attacked me and attacked me.” Nassau County was the defendant, but that’s not the way it felt.

The trial lasted four weeks, and when it was over Restivo felt—fleetingly—vindicated. “When that jury came back with that verdict sheet and said Volpe planted and withheld evidence? That was accountability,” Restivo said. “And that’s the only accountability I’m ever going to get.” Volpe received a commendation for his work in the Fusco trial, and retired in 2002 to become a car salesman. By then, the state had settled another case, in which he was accused of soliciting a false confession. He died in 2011. Marge Neidecker told me that it was the happiest day of Restivo’s life.

The second phase of the trial was for damages: the jury was charged with determining the monetary value of the losses that Halstead and Restivo had suffered, which meant that their present pain had to be examined. There was excruciating testimony from Halstead’s children, who talked about being separated from their father. His daughter Melissa—who had talked to him on the phone twice a week for eighteen years—sobbed in the courtroom as he read aloud a letter that she’d written to him when she was eleven years old: “You are not just the best father, you are my best friend.” After his release, Halstead lived with his son Jason and his family. But, ultimately, Jason asked him to leave: Halstead’s drinking was making life

difficult. He is living in Tallahassee, and has been in and out of rehab.

Nassau County’s lawyer argued that Halstead would have been damaged anyway: his brother died when he was three, he was sexually assaulted when he was seven, and he was removed from the care of his negligent mother when he was twelve. As the attorney put it, “All of his problems have seeds in the past.” When he questioned Restivo, he emphasized Restivo’s already strained relationship with his girlfriend, implying that he might have lost his son even if he hadn’t gone to prison.

The jurors rejected those arguments. It took them less than two hours to come back with a damage award: thirty-six million dollars. “When they said that number, it was, like, wow,” Restivo said. “Because the jury really *got* it. It put a real big smile on my mother’s face, because she has been fighting these people for all these years. So it wasn’t about the money. Although it is about the money. I don’t want to say that it isn’t about the money.”

Nina Morrison, of the Innocence Project, told me, “I think for a lot of the clients there’s a sense that this is going to be the thing that helps them move on. But then the jury goes home; we all go home. And then, at the end of the day, they are still left with the enormity of what they’ve lost.”

At the Centurion party, I overheard Michael Austin, a tall black man with a shaved head and a mellow demeanor, tell a recent exoneree, “You are still in prison.” Austin told me later that he had been through the same process; he spent twenty-seven years in a Maryland prison, and then “it took me ten years to feel like I was really, really home again.” He vividly remembers the day he was released. “One of the C.O.s”—corrections officers—“handed me a box with my property, and I started walking away as if I had on shackles. The C.O. said, ‘Mike, why you walking like that?’ I looked down at my ankles and said, ‘Oh, man—you’re right.’”

Austin had received \$1.4 million in compensation. He knew other exonerees who had received much more money, but he didn’t envy them; he’d seen things end badly. “I know a woman who got fourteen million. She bought her mother



“People think I’m bossy, too.”

a house, her sister a house, herself two houses." Before long, she had run out of money. It happened frequently, he said. "If you have a family that has been taking care of you while you were incarcerated, your primary objective is to take care of them now." It was a way of feeling like a person again—an adult, with agency.

Karen Daniel, of Northwestern, told me that money dispersed over time was often more effective than lump sums, for precisely this reason. "I have seen too many clients go through all their money, and then there's never going to be any more," she said. "It doesn't always happen in the expected ways. Some people might make poor choices and buy a fancy car. But, a lot of times, as soon as somebody is seen by relatives and friends as being exonerated, the relatives come out of the woodwork, the hands come out."

But the families of exonerees have suffered, too. Jason Halstead got a job when he was in high school to pay the phone bills he accumulated calling his father in prison. (Halstead received a \$2.2-million settlement from New York State, and gave a third of it to his children.) Richard Miles told me, "I see my sister going through things, my brother going through things. How can I have something they don't?" To Miles, sharing his compensation seemed like a matter of justice. "They were coming to visit me—all those years, it was like they were locked up, too."

Money feels, at least initially, like vindication: a jury or a government would not award millions of dollars if it didn't acknowledge the gravity of the wrong. "If somebody says, Let me give you 1.4 million—or eight million!—you think, Now everybody knows that I was really, really innocent," Austin said. "And at the moment you have that feeling of complete freedom. But how long does that last?" Ultimately, he felt, it was much more important to have a sense of purpose. When he came home to Baltimore, he got a job counselling troubled kids. "So I'm cool—I got a career," he said. "When the money came in, I just basically invested it." After three decades of being trapped, he also decided to have some adventures. "I went to South Africa, Jamaica. I went to Canada." He'd always wanted to be a singer; he loved

the music scene in Durban, and sat in with some bands there.

After Richard Miles was released from prison, he started an organization, Miles of Freedom, to provide services for communities affected by incarceration: a "Freedom Shuttle," for relatives to visit loved ones in prison; a lawn-care service to employ former inmates. "If you don't find anything to channel any type of negative thoughts into, you're going to just be thinking about it all day, every day," he told me. "You're just going to be stuck in this victimized state. I was already in a victimized state for fifteen years." Miles had married since his release, and his wife was pregnant with their first child, a daughter. "I oftentimes say, We've all been in prison," he said. "We imprison ourselves in relationships, in financial bankruptcy—we lock our own selves up. The only difference between my prison and yours is somebody else had the key to my release."

The years that Austin and Miles spent in prison seemed to have rendered them not bitter or weakened but uncommonly beneficent—a quality that struck me again and again when I met exonerees. "I haven't known one of them who hasn't had this moment of transcendence," Barry Scheck, of the Innocence Project, told me. He had a theory: the wrongly convicted who don't attain a kind of enlightened surrender are simply unable to survive. "We have lost a lot of clients who could not get past it—just can't cope, have been literally driven crazy, gotten into fatal fights, committed suicide." The choice for the wrongly convicted was stark: transcend or die.

Marge Neidecker and John Restivo married in 2009. "I figured I needed him, and he needed me," Neidecker said one afternoon, when we were eating lunch at a tiki bar on the riverbank near their house. A lean, muscular woman with blond bangs, Neidecker was wearing tight jeans, a black tank top, and glasses that went darker in bright light. When Restivo got out of prison, she, too, was going through a difficult time, and he was "a lifesaver," she said.

"I came home every night and he would have fixed something, or made a great dinner—he knows I work hard." It was very different from her last relationship. "I'd had enough of marriage," Neidecker said, grimacing. I asked her why she'd gone back to it, and she replied, emphatically, "Because I *loved* his ass." After Restivo renovated her house, they decorated the living room with several pictures of Bob Dylan.

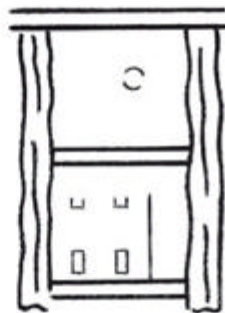
Lately, Restivo has been growing pineapples in the back yard. "They're not like the pineapples you buy in the store, all hard," he said. "I let them stay on the plant until they get soft and gold. To say they smell good would be an understatement."

Sometimes he volunteers to go into the woods near the lagoon—"where other people wouldn't dare go," Neidecker said—to distribute food to homeless people who sleep there.

A few times a week, when the weather is good, Restivo goes to the beach and casts for snook and bluefish and tarpon. Mostly he catches them and then lets them go. In his living room, he'd hung a placard that reads, "The charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable, and a perpetual series of occasions for hope." "Sitting there in the prison cell and filing motion after motion after motion, and you're hopeful—it's kind of the same thing," he told me.

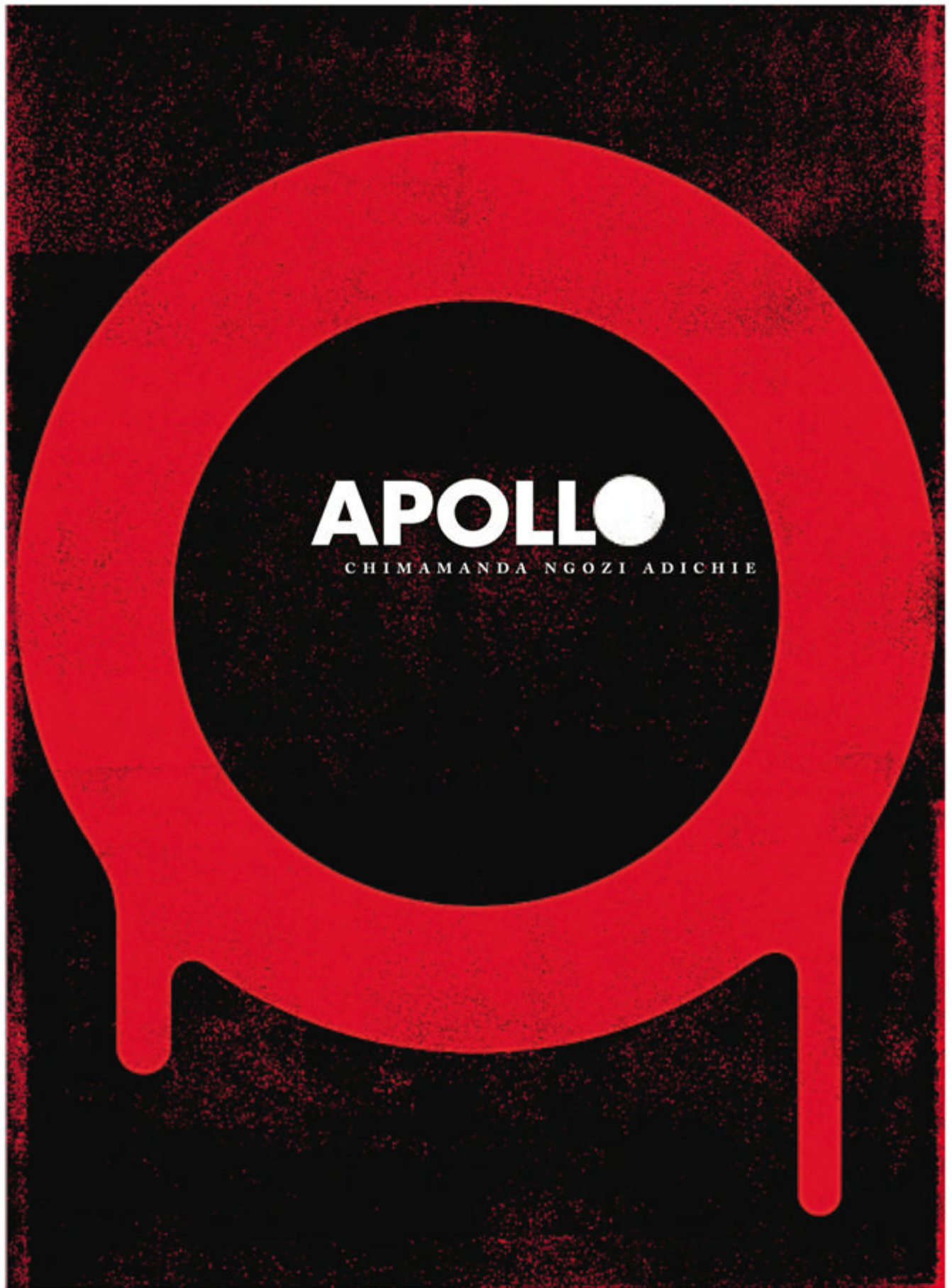
Restivo said that he wasn't impatient to receive his money—"I'm used to waiting"—and that he didn't fantasize about what he would do with eighteen million dollars. He thought about it for a moment. "I mean, listen, I would, like, you know, bless myself with a nice boat." He already had a name for it: Best Revenge.

Whether or not the money comes through, Neidecker and Restivo are looking forward to doing some traveling. "John wants to go to Alaska and go ice fishing," she said. "We both want to go to Northern California. But roughing it? No." She meant no camping out: she wanted to travel in a Winnebago. Neidecker's retirement from the post office was not far off; soon she would get her pension, and they could go whenever they wanted. She shrugged and said, "I've done my time." ♦



APOLLO

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



Twice a month, like a dutiful son, I visited my parents in Enugu, in their small overfurnished flat that grew dark in the afternoon. Retirement had changed them, shrunk them. They were in their late eighties, both small and mahogany-skinned, with a tendency to stoop. They seemed to look more and more alike, as though all the years together had made their features blend and bleed into one another. They even smelled alike—a menthol scent, from the green vial of Vicks VapoRub they passed to each other, carefully rubbing a little in their nostrils and on aching joints. When I arrived, I would find them either sitting out on the veranda overlooking the road or sunk into the living-room sofa, watching *Animal Planet*. They had a new, simple sense of wonder. They marvelled at the wiliness of wolves, laughed at the cleverness of apes, and asked each other, “Ifukwa? Did you see that?”

They had, too, a new, baffling patience for incredible stories. Once, my mother told me that a sick neighbor in Abba, our ancestral home town, had vomited a grasshopper—a living, writhing insect, which, she said, was proof that wicked relatives had poisoned him. “Somebody texted us a picture of the grasshopper,” my father said. They always supported each other’s stories. When my father told me that Chief Okeke’s young house help had mysteriously died, and the story around town was that the chief had killed the teenager and used her liver for moneymaking rituals, my mother added, “They say he used the heart, too.”

Fifteen years earlier, my parents would have scoffed at these stories. My mother, a professor of political science, would have said “Nonsense” in her crisp manner, and my father, a professor of education, would merely have snorted, the stories not worth the effort of speech. It puzzled me that they had shed those old selves, and become the kind of Nigerians who told anecdotes about diabetes cured by drinking holy water.

Still, I humored them and half listened to their stories. It was a kind of innocence, this new childhood of old age. They had grown slower with the passing years, and their faces lit up at the sight of me and even their prying questions—“When will you give us a

grandchild? When will you bring a girl to introduce to us?”—no longer made me as tense as before. Each time I drove away, on Sunday afternoons after a big lunch of rice and stew, I wondered if it would be the last time I would see them both alive, if before my next visit I would receive a phone call from one of them telling me to come right away. The thought filled me with a nostalgic sadness that stayed with me until I got back to Port Harcourt. And yet I knew that if I had a family, if I could complain about rising school fees as the children of their friends did, then I would not visit them so regularly. I would have nothing for which to make amends.

During a visit in November, my parents talked about the increase in armed robberies all over the east. Thieves, too, had to prepare for Christmas. My mother told me how a vigilante mob in Onitsha had caught some thieves, beaten them, and torn off their clothes—how old tires had been thrown over their heads like necklaces, amid shouts for petrol and matches, before the police arrived, fired shots in the air to disperse the crowd, and took the robbers away. My mother paused, and I waited for a supernatural detail that would embellish the story. Perhaps, just as they arrived at the police station, the thieves had turned into vultures and flown away.

“Do you know,” she continued, “one of the armed robbers, in fact the ring leader, was Raphael? He was our houseboy years ago. I don’t think you’ll remember him.”

I stared at my mother. “Raphael?”

“It’s not surprising he ended like this,” my father said. “He didn’t start well.”

My mind had been submerged in the foggy lull of my parents’ storytelling, and I struggled now with the sharp awakening of memory.

My mother said again, “You probably won’t remember him. There were so many of those houseboys. You were young.”

But I remembered. Of course I remembered Raphael.

Nothing changed when Raphael came to live with us, not at first. He seemed like all the others, an ordinary-looking teen from a nearby village. The houseboy before him, Hygi-

nus, had been sent home for insulting my mother. Before Hyginus was John, whom I remembered because he had not been sent away; he had broken a plate while washing it and, fearing my mother’s anger, had packed his things and fled before she came home from work. All the houseboys treated me with the contemptuous care of people who disliked my mother. Please come and eat your food, they would say—I don’t want trouble from Madam. My mother regularly shouted at them, for being slow, stupid, hard of hearing; even her bell-ringing, her thumb resting on the red knob, the shrillness searing through the house, sounded like shouting. How difficult could it be to remember to fry the eggs differently, my father’s plain and hers with onions, or to put the Russian dolls back on the same shelf after dusting, or to iron my school uniform properly?

I was my parents’ only child, born late in their lives. “When I got pregnant, I thought it was menopause,” my mother told me once. I must have been around eight years old, and did not know what “menopause” meant. She had a brusque manner, as did my father; they had about them the air of people who were quick to dismiss others. They had met at the University of Ibadan, married against their families’ wishes—his thought her too educated, while hers preferred a wealthier suitor—and spent their lives in an intense and intimate competition over who published more, who won at badminton, who had the last word in an argument. They often read aloud to each other in the evening, from journals or newspapers, standing rather than sitting in the parlor, sometimes pacing, as though about to spring at a new idea. They drank Mateus rosé—that dark, shapely bottle always seemed to be resting on a table near them—and left behind glasses faint with reddish dregs. Throughout my childhood, I worried about not being quick enough to respond when they spoke to me.

I worried, too, that I did not care for books. Reading did not do to me what it did to my parents, agitating them or turning them into vague beings lost to time, who did not quite notice when I came and went. I read

books only enough to satisfy them, and to answer the kinds of unexpected questions that might come in the middle of a meal—What did I think of Pip? Had Ezeulu done the right thing? I sometimes felt like an interloper in our house. My bedroom had bookshelves, stacked with the overflow books that did not fit in the study and the corridor, and they made my stay feel transient, as though I were not quite where I was supposed to be. I sensed my parents' disappointment in the way they glanced at each other when I spoke about a book, and I knew that what I had said was not incorrect but merely ordinary, uncharged with their brand of originality. Going to the staff club with them was an ordeal: I found badminton boring, the shuttlecock seemed to me an unfinished thing, as though whoever had invented the game had stopped halfway.

What I loved was kung fu. I watched "Enter the Dragon" so often that I knew all the lines, and I longed to wake up and be Bruce Lee. I would kick and strike at the air, at imaginary enemies who had killed my imaginary family. I would pull my mattress onto the floor, stand on two thick books—usually

hardcover copies of "Black Beauty" and "The Water-Babies"—and leap onto the mattress, screaming "Haaa!" like Bruce Lee. One day, in the middle of my practice, I looked up to see Raphael standing in the doorway, watching me. I expected a mild reprimand. He had made my bed that morning, and now the room was in disarray. Instead, he smiled, touched his chest, and brought his finger to his tongue, as though tasting his own blood. My favorite scene. I stared at Raphael with the pure thrill of unexpected pleasure. "I watched the film in the other house where I worked," he said. "Look at this."

He pivoted slightly, leaped up, and kicked, his leg straight and high, his body all taut grace. I was twelve years old and had, until then, never felt that I recognized myself in another person.

Raphael and I practiced in the backyard, leaping from the raised concrete soakaway and landing on the grass. Raphael told me to suck in my belly, to keep my legs straight and my fingers precise. He taught me to breathe. My previous attempts, in the enclosure of my room, had felt still-

born. Now, outside with Raphael, slicing the air with my arms, I could feel my practice become real, with soft grass below and high sky above, and the endless space mine to conquer. This was truly happening. I could become a black belt one day. Outside the kitchen door was a high open veranda, and I wanted to jump off its flight of six steps and try a flying kick. "No," Raphael said. "That veranda is too high."

On weekends, if my parents went to the staff club without me, Raphael and I watched Bruce Lee videotapes, Raphael saying, "Watch it! Watch it!" Through his eyes, I saw the films anew; some moves that I had thought merely competent became luminous when he said, "Watch it!" Raphael knew what really mattered; his wisdom lay easy on his skin. He rewound the sections in which Bruce Lee used a nunchaku, and watched unblinking, gasping at the clean aggression of the metal-and-wood weapon.

"I wish I had a nunchaku," I said.

"It is very difficult to use," Raphael said firmly, and I felt almost sorry to have wanted one.

Not long afterward, I came back from school one day and Raphael said, "See." From the cupboard he took out a nunchaku—two pieces of wood, cut from an old cleaning mop and sanded down, held together by a spiral of metal springs. He must have been making it for at least a week, in his free time after his housework. He showed me how to use it. His moves seemed clumsy, nothing like Bruce Lee's. I took the nunchaku and tried to swing it, but only ended up with a thump on my chest. Raphael laughed. "You think you can just start like that?" he said. "You have to practice for a long time."

At school, I sat through classes thinking of the wood's smoothness in the palm of my hand. It was after school, with Raphael, that my real life began. My parents did not notice how close Raphael and I had become. All they saw was that I now happened to play outside, and Raphael was, of course, part of the landscape of outside: weeding the garden, washing pots at the water tank. One afternoon, Raphael finished plucking a chicken and interrupted my



"Oh, there's your problem—twenty years of resentment at having to do the dishes."

solo practice on the lawn. “Fight!” he said. A duel began, his hands bare, mine swinging my new weapon. He pushed me hard. One end hit him on the arm, and he looked surprised and then impressed, as if he had not thought me capable. I swung again and again. He feinted and dodged and kicked. Time collapsed. In the end, we were both panting and laughing. I remember, even now, very clearly, the smallness of his shorts that afternoon, and how the muscles ran wiry like ropes down his legs.

On weekends, I ate lunch with my parents. I always ate quickly, dreaming of escape and hoping that they would not turn to me with one of their test questions. At one lunch, Raphael served white disks of boiled yam on a bed of greens, and then cubed pawpaw and pineapple.

“The vegetable was too tough,” my mother said. “Are we grass-eating goats?” She glanced at him. “What is wrong with your eyes?”

It took me a moment to realize that this was not her usual figurative lambasting—“What is that big object blocking your nose?” she would ask, if she noticed a smell in the kitchen that he had not. The whites of Raphael’s eyes were red. A painful, unnatural red. He mumbled that an insect had flown into them.

“It looks like Apollo,” my father said.

My mother pushed back her chair and examined Raphael’s face. “Ah-ah! Yes, it is. Go to your room and stay there.”

Raphael hesitated, as though wanting to finish clearing the plates.


“Go!” my father said. “Before you infect us all with this thing.”

Raphael, looking confused, edged away from the table. My mother called him back. “Have you had this before?”

“No, Madam.”

“It’s an infection of your conjunctiva, the thing that covers your eyes,” she said. In the midst of her Igbo words, “conjunctiva” sounded sharp and dangerous. “We’re going to buy medicine for you. Use it three times a day and stay in your room. Don’t cook until it clears.” Turning to me, she said, “Okenwa, make sure you don’t go near

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him. Apollo is very infectious." From her perfunctory tone, it was clear that she did not imagine I would have any reason to go near Raphael.

Later, my parents drove to the pharmacy in town and came back with a bottle of eye drops, which my father took to Raphael's room in the boys' quarters, at the back of the house, with the air of someone going reluctantly into battle. That evening, I went with my parents to Obollo Road to buy akara for dinner; when we returned, it felt strange not to have Raphael open the front door, not to find him closing the living-room curtains and turning on the lights. In the quiet kitchen, our house seemed emptied of life. As soon as my parents were immersed in themselves, I went out to the boys' quarters and knocked on Raphael's door. It was ajar. He was lying on his back, his narrow bed pushed against the wall, and turned when I came in, surprised, making as if to get up. I had never been in his room before. The exposed light bulb dangling from the ceiling cast sombre shadows.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing. I came to see how you are."

He shrugged and settled back down on the bed. "I don't know how I got this. Don't come close."

But I went close.

"I had Apollo in Primary 3," I said. "It will go quickly, don't worry. Have you used the eye drops this evening?"

He shrugged and said nothing. The bottle of eye drops sat unopened on the table.

"You haven't used them at all?" I asked.

"No."

"Why?"

He avoided looking at me. "I cannot do it."

Raphael, who could disembowel a turkey and lift a full bag of rice, could not drip liquid medicine into his eyes. At first, I was astonished, then amused, and then moved. I looked around his room and was struck by how bare it was—the bed pushed against the wall, a spindly table, a gray metal box in the corner, which I assumed contained all that he owned.

"I will put the drops in for you," I

said. I took the bottle and twisted off the cap.

"Don't come close," he said again.

I was already close. I bent over him. He began a frantic blinking.

"Breathe like in kung fu," I said.

I touched his face, gently pulled down his lower left eyelid, and dropped the liquid into his eye. The other lid I pulled more firmly, because he had shut his eyes tight.

"Ndo," I said. "Sorry."

He opened his eyes and looked at me, and on his face shone something wondrous. I had never felt myself the subject of admiration. It made me think of science class, of a new maize shoot growing greenly toward light. He touched my arm. I turned to go.

"I'll come before I go to school," I said.

In the morning, I slipped into his room, put in his eye drops, and slipped out and into my father's car, to be dropped off at school.

By the third day, Raphael's room felt familiar to me, welcoming, uncluttered by objects. As I put in the drops, I discovered things about him that I guarded closely: the early darkening of hair above his upper lip, the ringworm patch in the hollow between his jaw and his neck. I sat on the edge of his bed and we talked about "Snake in the Monkey's Shadow." We had discussed the film many times, and we said things that we had said before, but in the quiet of his room they felt like secrets. Our voices were low, almost hushed. His body's warmth cast warmth over me.

He got up to demonstrate the snake style, and afterward, both of us laughing, he grasped my hand in his. Then he let go and moved slightly away from me.

"This Apollo has gone," he said.

His eyes were clear. I wished he had not healed so quickly.

I dreamed of being with Raphael and Bruce Lee in an open field, practicing for a fight. When I woke up, my eyes refused to open. I pried my lids apart. My eyes burned and itched. Each time I blinked, they seemed to produce

more pale ugly fluid that coated my lashes. It felt as if heated grains of sand were under my eyelids. I feared that something inside me was thawing that was not supposed to thaw.

My mother shouted at Raphael, "Why did you bring this thing to my house? Why?" It was as though by catching Apollo he had conspired to infect her son. Raphael did not respond. He never did when she shouted at him. She was standing at the top of the stairs, and Raphael was below her.

"How did he manage to give you Apollo from his room?" my father asked me.

"It wasn't Raphael. I think I got it from somebody in my class," I told my parents.

"Who?" I should have known my mother would ask. At that moment, my mind erased all my classmates' names.

"Who?" she asked again.

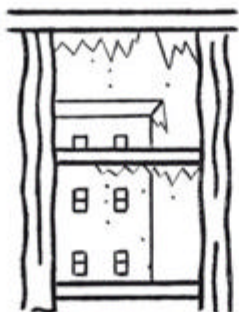
"Chidi Obi," I said finally, the first name that came to me. He sat in front of me and smelled like old clothes.

"Do you have a headache?" my mother asked.

"Yes."

My father brought me Panadol. My mother telephoned Dr. Igboke. My parents were brisk. They stood by my door, watching me drink a cup of Milo that my father had made. I drank quickly. I hoped that they would not drag an armchair into my room, as they did every time I was sick with malaria, when I would wake up with a bitter tongue to find one parent inches from me, silently reading a book, and I would will myself to get well quickly, to free them.

Dr. Igboke arrived and shined a torch in my eyes. His cologne was strong; I could smell it long after he'd gone, a heady scent close to alcohol that I imagined would worsen nausea. After he left, my parents created a patient's altar by my bed—on a table covered with cloth, they put a bottle of orange Lucozade, a blue tin of glucose, and freshly peeled oranges on a plastic tray. They did not bring the armchair, but one of them was home throughout the week that I had Apollo. They took turns putting in my eye drops, my father more clumsily than my mother, leaving sticky liquid running down my face. They did



not know how well I could put in the drops myself. Each time they raised the bottle above my face, I remembered the look in Raphael's eyes that first evening in his room, and I felt haunted by happiness.

My parents closed the curtains and kept my room dark. I was sick of lying down. I wanted to see Raphael, but my mother had banned him from my room, as though he could somehow make my condition worse. I wished that he would come and see me. Surely he could pretend to be putting away a bedsheet, or bringing a bucket to the bathroom. Why didn't he come? He had not even said sorry to me. I strained to hear his voice, but the kitchen was too far away and his voice, when he spoke to my mother, was too low.

Once, after going to the toilet, I tried to sneak downstairs to the kitchen, but my father loomed at the bottom of the stairs.

"Kedu?" He asked. "Are you all right?"

"I want water," I said.

"I'll bring it. Go and lie down."

Finally, my parents went out together. I had been sleeping, and woke up to sense the emptiness of the house. I hurried downstairs and to the kitchen. It, too, was empty. I wondered if Raphael was in the boys' quarters; he was not supposed to go to his room during the day, but maybe he had, now that my parents were away. I went out to the open veranda. I heard Raphael's voice before I saw him, standing near the tank, digging his foot into the sand, talking to Josephine, Professor Nwosu's house help. Professor Nwosu sometimes sent eggs from his poultry, and never let my parents pay for them. Had Josephine brought eggs? She was tall and plump; now she had the air of someone who had already said goodbye but was lingering. With her, Raphael was different—the slouch in his back, the agitated foot. He was shy. She was talking to him with a kind of playful power, as though she could see through him to things that amused her. My reason blurred.

"Raphael!" I called out.

He turned. "Oh. Okenwa. Are you allowed to come downstairs?"

He spoke as though I were a child,



"My greatest asset is my ability to tell you exactly what you want to hear."

as though we had not sat together in his dim room.

"I'm hungry! Where is my food?" It was the first thing that came to me, but in trying to be imperious I sounded shrill.

Josephine's face puckered, as though she were about to break into slow, long laughter. Raphael said something that I could not hear, but it had the sound of betrayal. My parents drove up just then, and suddenly Josephine and Raphael were roused. Josephine hurried out of the compound, and Raphael came toward me. His shirt was stained in the front, orangish, like palm oil from soup. Had my parents not come back, he would have stayed there mumbling by the tank; my presence had changed nothing.

"What do you want to eat?" he asked.

"You didn't come to see me."

"You know Madam said I should not go near you."

Why was he making it all so common and ordinary? I, too, had been asked not to go to his room, and yet I had gone, I had put in his eye drops every day.

"After all, you gave me the Apollo," I said.

"Sorry." He said it dully, his mind elsewhere.

I could hear my mother's voice. I was angry that they were back. My

time with Raphael was shortened, and I felt the sensation of a widening crack.

"Do you want plantain or yam?" Raphael asked, not to placate me but as if nothing serious had happened. My eyes were burning again. He came up the steps. I moved away from him, too quickly, to the edge of the veranda, and my rubber slippers shifted under me. Unbalanced, I fell. I landed on my hands and knees, startled by the force of my own weight, and I felt the tears coming before I could stop them. Stiff with humiliation, I did not move.

My parents appeared.

"Okenwa!" my father shouted.

I stayed on the ground, a stone sunk in my knee. "Raphael pushed me."

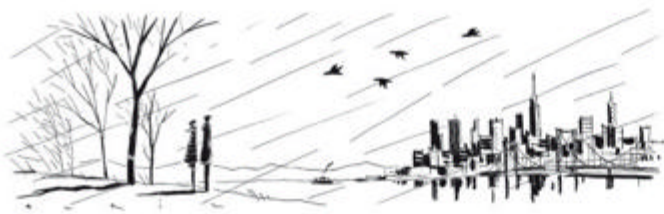
"What?" My parents said it at the same time, in English. "What?"

There was time. Before my father turned to Raphael, and before my mother lunged at him as if to slap him, and before she told him to go pack his things and leave immediately, there was time. I could have spoken. I could have cut into that silence. I could have said that it was an accident. I could have taken back my lie and left my parents merely to wonder. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on "Apollo."

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

OUT OF THIS WORLD

James Merrill's supernatural muse.

BY DAN CHIASSON

In his poem “An Urban Convalescence,” James Merrill wrote of the “dull need to make some kind of house / Out of the life lived, out of the love spent.” It is a classic Merrill formulation. People are supposed to “make” houses out of blossoming aspirations and love, before busting them up in resignation and defeat. Merrill, rich since birth, as he said, “whether I liked it or not,” and one of the greatest formalist poets this country has ever produced, had seen this pattern play out in his family’s houses (especially the Orchard, his father’s Southampton summer estate, designed by McKim, Mead & White) and, painfully, in his own, in Key West; Stonington, Connecticut; and Athens, Greece. But poetry starts building when love starts dying; it erects its structures durably on emptiness. Rupture and conflict are aesthetic necessities: they turn the broken home into “The Broken Home,” Merrill’s great poem about his childhood. Though his poems can be as grand and spacious as the houses he knew, they are founded on loss. To say that Merrill is among our finest poets of interiors is merely to pick up on a pun implicit in all his work.

Langdon Hammer’s extraordinary biography of the poet, “James Merrill: Life and Art” (Knopf), suggests that “life” and “art” were for Merrill a feedback loop, not at all Yeats’s zero-sum choice between “perfection of the life, or of the work.” Merrill maintained that he sometimes wrote “lest he think / Of the reasons why he writes— / Boredom, fear, mixed vanities and shames; / Also love.”

But he lived in conscious pursuit of his own “chills and fever, passions and betrayals, / Chiefly in order to make song of them.” He compared the poet off the page to an “empty hive”; he said, as many say, that he “lived to write.” Merrill, whose income came from a trust set up by his father, could afford the leisure to do anything he pleased, or nothing at all. Instead, he filled his days with work, transforming stitch by stitch the endless idle hours into measured intervals of language that, in turn, measured his days. “The years lay open before him,” Hammer writes, “a book of fresh, blank pages.”

Biographers are sometimes chastised for drowning their readers in trivia. Merrill’s work exists in part to reverse our bias against trivia. We need to know the origins and the importance of the prisms and cups and mirrors and kimonos that Merrill collected on his travels abroad and his rambles closer to home and then preserved in his poems. These constituted, as Hammer puts it, “a lexicon he used for self-expression”; the objects Merrill selected used him, in turn, “to express themselves.” His work is replete with the transfigured commonplace, bits of the world reclaimed in his daily imaginative raids: an “Atari dragonfly” on the Connecticut River, a joint smoked on a courthouse lawn, a trip to the gym, a Tyvek windbreaker. Hammer, the chair of Yale’s English department, is first and foremost a gifted poetry critic, which means that he knows how to tell a story, without hype, about how poems are made, and he appreciates the irony of an art that made

ski trips and wallpaper central to American literature. And Ouija boards: Merrill made the most ambitious American poem of the past fifty years, seventeen thousand lines long, in consultation with one. The result, “The Changing Light at Sandover,” was a homemade cosmology as dense as Blake’s, which Merrill shared with the “summer people”—retired naval officers and frisky elderly Brahmin ladies—who lived near him in Stonington. He knew that posterity alone would decide on his greatness; he would not be around to enjoy the proceeds. He hedged his bets by driving a small Ford with a license plate that read “POET.”

Whatever the magnificence and the difficulty of Merrill’s achievement, Hammer views him as a sublime poet of the everyday, much like Wallace Stevens, another Connecticut man of fixed habits whose mélange of abstraction and gaudiness Merrill admired. Merrill’s vexed relationship to time—relying upon, while fearing, its abundance—all but insured that he would be a formalist, since high-wire prosody and opulent forms are in essence timepieces, subjecting language to their secure and established rhythms. Merrill did not normally improvise; his drafts show that his first thought was by no means his best. In his early poems, collected in “The Black Swan” (1946) and “The Country of a Thousand Years of Peace” (1959), language is a kind of brittle tracery impervious to the passing of time. In the poems of “Water Street” (1962), he widens the aperture to take in the person who was drawn to write those hermetic verses in the first place. Merrill’s habits were such that, returning twice a day to his work, he was sometimes in a position to respond to his poems in his poems, often with gratitude, sometimes with suspicion. As Hammer puts it, he was unusually “open to modulation and revision” in the course of the poem he was writing. In “An Urban Convalescence,” Merrill, annoyed by an earlier phrase he had written (“the sickness of our time”), simultaneously takes it back and lets it stand:

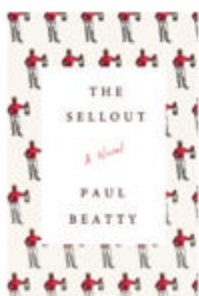
There are certain phrases which to use in
a poem
Is like rubbing silver with quicksilver.
Bright
But facile, the glamour deadens overnight.
For instance, how “the sickness of our time”
Enhances, then debases, what I feel.

This kind of revision in broad daylight,

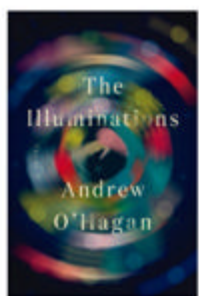


Merrill, born rich, as he said, "whether I liked it or not," thought of writing as a desk job. He converted his surfeit of time into art.

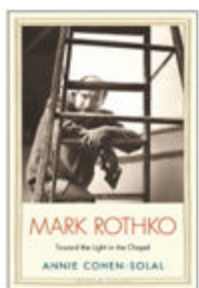
BRIEFLY NOTED



THE SELLOUT, by Paul Beatty (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). “This may be hard to believe, coming from a black man, but I’ve never stolen anything,” Beatty’s narrator and protagonist says at the outset of this outrageous, riff-strewn satire on race in America. An urban farmer angered by the country’s racial politics, he decides to resegregate his mostly black town, on the outskirts of Los Angeles, starting with a local school and the bus his girlfriend drives. He also enslaves a close friend and ends up before the Supreme Court, sitting on “a thickly padded chair that, much like this country, isn’t quite as comfortable as it looks.” The book combines effervescent comedy and stinging critique, but its most arresting quality is the lively humanity of its characters.



THE ILLUMINATIONS, by Andrew O’Hagan (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). This novel toggles between a photographer, Anne, slowly losing herself to dementia, and her grandson, Luke, an officer serving with the British Army in Afghanistan. While Anne fixates on fond memories of the rather mysterious father of her daughter, Luke is troubled by a combat fiasco for which he bears responsibility. The two travel together to Blackpool, the resort town where Anne spent her happiest times, to view the lighting of the attractions that give the book its title. O’Hagan lays out his themes of memory and loss a little too tidily, but he captures the brutal camaraderie of young soldiers, and his portrayal of Anne’s deterioration is sensitive and gripping.



MARK ROTHKO, by Annie Cohen-Solal (*Yale*). This compact study places Rothko’s development within the context of the evolution of American art in the mid-twentieth century. Rothko, a brilliant Russian émigré, won a scholarship to Yale only to have it revoked by the university’s increasingly anti-Semitic administration. He turned to painting, hoping to create art that would be “primarily moral” and also “tragic and timeless,” standing apart from convention and institutions. Yet for decades he remained firmly within the Western European tradition, producing lackluster examples of figurative painting and surrealism. The breakthrough came in 1948, with “No. 1.” Cohen-Solal subtly demonstrates the link between Rothko’s three outsider statuses (artist, immigrant, and Jew), his color-block canvases, and his essential Americanness.



AMERICAN APOCALYPSE, by Matthew Avery Sutton (*Harvard*). This history of the modern American evangelical movement argues that, for more than a century, its members have simultaneously embraced end-time prophecy—interpreting world events as “signs” of Jesus’ imminent return—and politics. The apparent paradox in this “engaged premillennialism” (why bother with Congress if the rapture is near?) was, Sutton writes, answered with the Biblical injunction to “occupy” the world while waiting. Almost from the beginning, this meant support for conservative positions and for Israel. The history Sutton assembles is rich, and the connections are startling. Ronald Reagan, while President, wrote in his diary, “Sometimes I wonder if we are destined to witness Armageddon.”

unmasking the error without redacting it, may seem like a form of spontaneity, but it is the working relationship that poets find only to poems that accompany them over the long haul. Merrill’s poem is set “at my desk,” where, a moment later in the poem, hoping for some psychoactive upside, he decides to swallow “a pill/They had told me not to take until much later.” A poem is an environment in which inspiration comes and goes; the moods shift, the mind can turn upon itself. You can take a pill in the middle of it. At these moments, Merrill seems very close to his father, whose work he respected and wanted to honor, and very far from the confessional poets whose autobiographical work might have catalyzed Merrill’s own. His father had used his money to buy his son time; Merrill, who thought of writing as a desk job, not a crucible for unprecedented intensities of self-exposure, converted that surfeit of time, a gift that could have become a burden, into art.

Merrill’s childhood was a kind of floating world he wandered into, the way a child wakes up and realizes, as Merrill no doubt often did, that a loud party is under way downstairs. He was born in 1926, the only child of the marriage of Charles Merrill, who co-founded Merrill Lynch, and Hellen Ingram, his second wife, who published a society newspaper in Florida. The family moved among several properties: in addition to the Orchard, they owned a town house on West Eleventh Street, in New York; a penthouse in the Carlyle Hotel; an estate in Palm Beach; and a plantation in Mississippi. There were two children from Charlie Merrill’s previous marriage, Charles and Doris, who paid extended, sometimes uneasy, visits. Add to that dozens of servants and, on weekends at the Orchard, a constant supply of sparkly guests, including Hoagy Carmichael, Gloria Swanson, and George Gershwin, who practiced “Oh, Kay!” on the Merrills’ piano, with Gertrude Lawrence standing by. John Woolsey, the judge who cleared “Ulysses” of obscenity charges, was a family friend; Charlie Merrill was one of the two anonymous “men of the world” whose approval of the book Woolsey cited in his verdict.

His parents drank and fought (a “marriage on the rocks,” Merrill called it) until, when Merrill was eleven, they split up. These “household operas” at the

Orchard, “the house of fifty rooms,” decorated with Flemish tapestries and a Milanese fireplace and gorgeous chandeliers, prepared him for real operas at the Met, where, that fall, he took in every production. Merrill’s “opera-going self” was, he wrote, “born in the music room at Southampton during the summer (1937) my parents separated.” Merrill, who went on to suffer his own share of painful breakups, believed thereafter that “strong feelings are the stuff of art,” belonging “not in the home but on the stage.” Nearly all his important traumas found their way into his art. Poetry was somehow more real, less of a performance, than life, which required the falsification of desire or (and it was the same thing) its swift channelling into normative forms, unavailable to Merrill as to every openly gay person of the time: marriage, a conventional career, children.

Domesticity, its ardors and rigors, unspoken binds and compacts, was one of Merrill’s major subjects. There’s little question that he and David Jackson, his partner for the last four decades of his life, would have married had they been permitted to do so. But the relationship was often estranged, and Merrill suffered passionately: he made greater poems out of the ups and downs of romantic love than any other poet of his era. A person who measures himself according to the arrows and vectors of the heart needs a sense of the circle that these lines bisect. He sought rupture and reprise in equal measure.

It was the repertory nature of opera, a fixed canon that he could return to throughout his life, that perhaps most stimulated Merrill. Three of his finest poems revisit the period of his parents’ separation; two focus on the days that Hellen Merrill took him to the Met to see Wagner’s Ring cycle. “Matinees” was published in 1969; “The Ring Cycle” appeared in Merrill’s final volume, “A Scattering of Salts,” published in 1995, a month after he died. The earlier poem ends with the young Merrill re-creating the performance by playing his “record of the Overture/Over and over.” Merrill learned many things from Proust, the subject of his thesis at Amherst, including the idea that art works create their creators; “Matinees” constructs the conditions under which the mind that made it was formed. When an overture is over,

you play it over again. And so the first poem requires the second, as, in Proust, every “new” impression waits, for its completion, upon future recollection. Round and round you go, until you find yourself, fifty years later, watching yourself watch the action: “The Ring Cycle” ends with a dream in which Merrill sees his “son till now undreamed of”—his younger self, his youthful lovers, and his own yet-unlived life—in the row behind him at the opera.

Merrill treats his childhood like a cold case, returning again and again to the evidence. The technique is never more brilliant than in “Lost in Translation,” the third poem about the crucial years of the late nineteen-thirties. Merrill excelled at the longer lyric, poems of between fifty and three hundred lines; this is his masterpiece of the form, a tour de force of modes and styles that describes its own construction by tracking the assembly of a wooden jigsaw puzzle during the long “summer without parents.” The poem begins before the puzzle is delivered from a rental store, a card table’s “tense oasis of green felt” waiting to turn “felt” into feeling, the axis from past to present which Merrill so often traces. The poem is the real puzzle; its readers are the expectant eleven-year-olds, making sense of a world whose rules are evident only to the authorities. As in all Merrill’s best poems, “life goes on” outside the borders of art:

German lesson, picnic, see-saw, walk
With the collie who “did everything but
talk”—
Sour windfalls of the orchard back of us.

Those “windfalls” are the spoils of capital and the “sour” dregs of the “orchard,” which gave the Orchard its name. The poem is very much about the puzzles associated with, and pieced together by, language. His French governess who “does borders” at the felt table turns out to have had a Prussian father, a “shameful secret” she kept “to the end.” “Lost in Translation” is, like the puzzle it describes, an aesthetic environment that expects intermittent attention; I have read it several times a year for all my adulthood, giving it the same relation to my life that its events had to its author’s. We put the poem together fully only when we’ve put ourselves together, but the pining for order and meaning

never abates. There is always one missing piece:

Before the puzzle was boxed and
readdressed
To the puzzle shop in the mid-Sixties,
Something tells me that one piece
contrived
To stay in the boy’s pocket. How do I
know?
I know because so many later puzzles
Had missing pieces—Maggie Teyte’s
high notes
Gone at the war’s end, end of the vogue
for collies,
A house torn down; and hadn’t
Mademoiselle
Kept back her pitiful bit of truth as well?

Merrill is a tough puzzle for a biographer, for some common reasons and some not so common. He has never had a full-dress biography, but when he died, at the age of sixty-eight, he left many brilliant friends who supplied warm tributes. In 1993, two years before his death, he published “A Different Person,” a memoir of his youth. He has long been the subject of literary criticism of the highest calibre.

Many literary biographers have to compete with their subjects, especially if, like Merrill, they were attentive to their own lives as they unfolded and armed to tell the story in their own terms. Given the radiant poems that Merrill made out of his life’s key chapters, the prospect of a biography, which converts those poems back into the pedestrian facts they transformed, can seem a bad idea. Merrill had few blind spots: his head was aware of his heart, and his imagination had unusual access to both. He approached his life with a weird mixture of abandon and detachment. There are no Merrill scandals. He wasn’t Mother Teresa, but he kept most of the friends he made, inspired forgiveness in most of his ex-lovers, and treated those whose lives drifted through the rarefied precincts of his own as though they were kings in disguise.

But there are two linked mysteries at the center of Merrill’s work, and nobody before Hammer has figured out a satisfying way to present them. The first is why this worldly, witty, undecieved man spent forty years, off and on, conducting séances with the spirit world through the medium of a cheap Ouija board. (On the day of Charlie Merrill’s death, James heard about it twice: once in a communiqué from his mother to him

in Kyoto, Japan, where he was travelling, and again, later that day, from the elder Merrill himself, through the Ouija board.) The second enigma is how, as a result of these sessions, Merrill came to produce a seventeen-thousand-line poem, an “occult splendor,” to quote Harold Bloom, that has few analogues in literature. It is made up in large part of transcripts, lightly reconfigured, of the messages Merrill collected with an overturned teacup and a square of paper. Any demystifications of the project that we can muster—it’s a folly, it’s an illness, it’s a prank—are addressed in the poem, which, taking its own plausibility as a chief concern, thereby becomes only more plausible.

Hammer’s emphasis is on the social worlds that this otherworldly poem cemented, and its effect on the “two minds” who made it together, Merrill and Jackson. “The Changing Light at Sandover” began in social life, as a feature of Merrill and Jackson’s long evenings with their guests in the Stonington apartment. It united friends and neighbors, many of whom appear in the poem in life and, later, in death. (When a beloved neighbor went blind, Merrill read his enormous poem aloud to her in its entirety.) “Sandover” constructs a kind of raucous supernatural party where spirits, including those of Wallace Stevens and W. H. Auden, Merrill’s father and Jackson’s parents, elbow for attention, as did the real friends who clustered around the pair throughout the process of assembling the poem. It is a kind of turnstile allowing passage between the world and the page, the living and the dead.

Merrill and Jackson, Hammer writes, “fell in love and discovered the Other World at exactly the same time,” around June, 1953. The Ouija board makes an appearance six years later, in the poem “Voices from the Other World.” These first snippets of dialogue with the beyond establish the conventions used in “Sandover”—Merrill’s and his friends’ earthy commentary in lowercase, the spirits’ confessions and harangues in all caps. The authors first meet “an engineer/originally from Cologne”:

Dead in his 22nd year
Of cholera in Cairo, he had KNOWN
NO HAPPINESS. He once met Goethe,
though.
Goethe had told him: PERSEVERE.

“The Book of Ephraim,” the first volume of “Sandover,” is organized alphabetically, like the letters on the board; the second, “Mirabell: Book of Numbers,” is arranged numerically; and the third, “Scripts for the Pageant,” is split into three sections, “Yes,” “&,” and “No.” Merrill and Jackson, called “JM” and “DJ” throughout, act as “scribe” and “hand,” respectively: Merrill reshaped into poetry the raw material that Jackson, acting as the “hand” of the bodiless spirits, copied down. Merrill was at times a reluctant scribe, describing in “Mirabell” his wish to return to “private life, in my own words. Instead,” he wrote, “Here I go again, a vehicle / In this cosmic carpool.”

It is not hard to imagine a Ouija board at one of those wild twenties parties thrown in Southampton by Merrill’s parents, during the brief vogue, among the country-house set, for spiritualism and the occult. Around that time, in Ireland, Yeats, one of Merrill’s masters, had, under the sway of his wife, made contact with spirits who had come to give him “metaphors for poetry.” (Auden was not the only admirer of Yeats who thought this was “mumbo jumbo.”) Other poets had experimented with a Ouija board, notably Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, in a failed effort to leaven the boredom of domestic evenings together. The San Francisco poet Jack Spicer wrote poems that he claimed had been dictated to him by voices from “the Outside.” But all of them seem to be sojourners in the occult arts compared with Merrill and Jackson. As the thousands of pages of transcripts of their sessions show, they went deeper into the supernatural than anyone of their intelligence and character had in a long time, and produced something—a great poem that makes us question what we think we know about the universe—that is without precedent in modern poetry.

“Sandover” is antic, eccentric, sometimes impossible to follow. But you are never more than a few lines from something devastating or hilarious. It has a pathos more natural to the terrain of lyric poetry than to a supernatural epic. Imagine if we could talk to our dead—what would they tell us? DJ’s

mother, who, in the afterlife, has taken up with the critic Marius Bewley, is headed, with him, to visit Mary’s “namesake”:

Marius: EACH TO HIS OWN
MARY & I
ARE OFF TO SEE HER VIRGIN
NAMESAKE WHY
DO PEOPLE BOTHER ALWAYS SUCH
A CRUSH
She holds court? TRAFFIC COURT
MARY: BYE BYE
And starts to leave, but D had broken
down.
NO TEARS O DARLING STOP HIS
TEARS DON’T CRY
Mama, your last words—YES YES &
YOUR FIRST ONES
Was it awful? Did it hurt to die?
I LOOKED DOWN AT YOUR POOR
OLD WRINKLED FACE
THOUGHT OF MY BABY LEARNING
HOW TO TALK

Merrill died, in February, 1995, of complications from AIDS. He left a sublime suite of last poems, including “Christmas Tree,” a shaped poem spoken by the tree after it has been cut down in the forest. Knowing that “it would be only a matter of weeks,” the tree is “wound in jewels” to “keep my spirits up” and sustained by “a primitive IV.” The tree finds, at the poem’s close, reasons “Still to be so poised, so / Receptive. Still to recall, to praise.”

One wonders if Merrill, who never closed the door on the possibility that he believed literally in his Other World, was as comforted by the afterlife he so richly constructed. Its denizens read him, according to Matt Jackson, David’s father:

O JIM WE LEARN U HERE You read
me?
WELL FOR THOSE OF US WHO
AREN’T GREAT READERS
LET’S SAY IT IS AN EXPERIENCE WE
HAVE
& I PICK UP SOME STATUS THRU
MY SON

For anybody picking up this work, or any of Merrill’s exquisite, dense, vulnerable lyrics, for the first time, the phrase “IT IS AN EXPERIENCE” will ring true. You need a guide; perhaps someone should get out the Ouija board and try to contact JM. Until then, here on earth, we have in Hammer’s book as vivid and artful an account of an author’s life and work as we are likely to encounter. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

SIGHT UNSEEN

The hows and whys of invisibility.

BY KATHRYN SCHULZ



It is possible, according to many sources, to become invisible, but you must be patient, methodical, and willing to eat almost anything. One characteristic spell, recorded by the British polymath John Aubrey around 1680, instructs you to begin by acquiring the severed head of a man who has committed suicide. You then bury the head, together with seven black beans, on a Wednesday morning before sunrise, and water the ground for seven days with fine brandy. On the eighth day, the beans will sprout, whereupon you must persuade a little girl to pick and shell them. Pop one into your mouth, and you will turn invisible.

If you don't have eight days to wait,

you can, instead, gather water from a fountain exactly at midnight (invisibility spells are fetishistic about time management), bring it to a boil, and drop in a live black cat. Let it simmer for twenty-four hours, fish out whatever remains, throw the meat over your left shoulder, then take the bones and, while looking in a mirror, place them one by one between the teeth on the left side of your mouth. You'll know you've turned invisible when you turn invisible.

I don't recommend trying these spells. If you're going to fail to disappear, you may as well do so through methods less gross and felonious: by reciting the names of demons in Latin, for instance, or car-

rying around a slip of paper with twelve numbers arranged in a mystical pattern, or trying on a lot of hats and cloaks and rings. Alternatively, you can endeavor to turn invisible through far more prosaic means and stand a decent chance of succeeding. Getting someone to distract your would-be observers works (ask a pickpocket), as does good camouflage (ask an octopus). Hunching your shoulders and staring at the ground isn't foolproof, but it beats "The Joy of Cooking Cats." Recent high-tech efforts to turn invisible are not, as yet, significantly more successful than magic beans, but they are more reputable, more lucrative, and, in the long run, more promising.

These strategies differ so dramatically that they raise an obvious question: just what *is* invisibility? Is it the condition of being transparent, so that all light passes through you undisturbed? Or of being cloaked in something all-concealing, like Harry Potter sneaking around Hogwarts? Or does it mean to be incorporeal, so that you exist but are made, like a thought, of nothing? Or does it simply mean to be overlooked? Is it always a property of whatever is unperceived, or can it be a limitation of the would-be perceiver? And why do we count as invisible the things that we do? Ghosts, gods, demons, superheroes, ether, X rays, amoebas, emotions, mathematical concepts, dark matter, Casper, Pete's Dragon, the Cheshire Cat—what is all this stuff doing in the same category? And why have we ourselves expended so much imagination and energy in trying to join them?

These questions are not so much answered as provoked by "Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen" (Chicago), by the British science writer Philip Ball. A former editor of *Nature* and the author of nineteen previous books (he should write about that superpower), Ball leads us on a very fun, largely chronological journey through invisibility, beginning with myth and early magicians, ending with quantum physics, and stopping along the way at Newton, Leibniz, microscopy, photography, spiritualism, B movies, and science fiction. He is lucid and interesting on every topic he touches, from the ghost in "Hamlet" to those unseen extra dimensions posited by string theory. But he is more a tour guide than a theorist, and he never entirely

The condition of being unseen is a fantasy of power, and a metaphor for powerlessness.



succeeds at pulling the category together, or illuminating our own ambivalent relationship to the prospect of becoming invisible.

Still, his book takes seriously a subject that, perhaps aptly, has heretofore been mostly disregarded. Invisibility looms large in the kingdom of childhood—in pretend play and imaginary friends, in fairy tales and comic books and other fictions for kids—but it seldom receives sustained adult scrutiny. And yet, once you get past the cloaks and the spells, invisibility is a consummately grownup matter. As a condition, a metaphor, a fantasy, and a technology, it helps us think about the composition of nature, the structure of society, and the deep weirdness of our human situation—about what it is like to be partly visible entities in a largely inscrutable universe. As such, the story of invisibility is not really about how to vanish at all. Curiously enough, it is a story about how we see ourselves.

If you are put off by magical methods for turning invisible, there are two other basic strategies available to you. The first is through technology; the second, through psychology. In a pattern you might recognize from the rest of life, the technological methods are exciting, expensive, and iffy, while the psychological methods are cheap, effective, and underappreciated.

In nature, the most successful invis-

ibility technology, after being invisible, is camouflage. Perhaps you have seen a stick insect sitting on a stick, or a leaf-shaped katydid hanging from a branch—but probably you have not, so well do they blend in. Yet theirs is nature's least and lowest kind of camouflage. When a flatfish hovers in the water, Ball tells us, sensors on its underbelly register the color and brightness of the surface below—information the fish uses to reproduce the look on its upper body, so that it matches its background. Some cephalopods see that trick and raise it, rather literally: they can change not only color but also texture, developing bumps or ridges (or, conversely, smoothing out) to mimic their surroundings. You can kill an entire workday watching videos of octopuses emerging from their hidden state; they look as if they have opened a door in space-time and are sliding back into the ocean from some other dimension.

Humans don't come equipped with camouflage, but we can copy nature's tricks. In our most basic efforts, we simply cover ourselves with material that matches our environment. Thus do duck hunters hunt ducks, and thus did Birnam wood come to Dunsinane. Post-Macduff, militaries got more sophisticated; by the early twentieth century, the British Navy was painting ships with bold alternating patterns of light and dark, which are not remotely invisible up close but, from a distance, break up

familiar outlines and make shape recognition difficult. That technique is useful, but, as Ball points out, it illustrates a fundamental limitation of camouflage: it is, by definition, context-specific. You can blend in on a sunny day at noon or on a gray day at dusk, when seen from nearby or from afar, but you cannot do all of these at once—and you can't repaint your battleship four times a day.

Or, anyway, you couldn't. Recently, militaries have started exploring digital camouflage technology that would allow ships to function like flatfish, detecting their surroundings and changing in response. Using similar methods, the Japanese scientist Susumu Tachi is designing invisibility cloaks, and a suburb of Seoul is planning an invisible skyscraper. In theory, such technology mimics transparency, because you seem to be looking through the object to whatever lies behind it. The results, so far, are extremely cool, and extremely not invisible. You can spot the design flaw yourself, if you've ever watched the moon disappear behind the Flatiron Building as you cross Twenty-third Street: what's behind an object depends, in part, on the location of the viewer. Even if digital camouflage could make a building seem to disappear from the perspective of one completely stationary observer (a big if), everyone else in the area would see it just fine.

The more interesting new invisibility technology has no analogue in the natural world. In fact, it is distinctly unnatural, since it involves getting light waves to bend around an object and reunite on the other side. The common metaphor is a boulder in a river: although water parts when it hits a rock, the rock does not have a long dry strip of riverbed on its downstream side. Instead, the water meets up again, so that, mere inches from the boulder, there's no sign that the flow was ever interrupted. If light waves followed that same course, we would not be able to see the object around which they parted, because no light would bounce off it and return to our retinas. But we would still be able to see whatever lay beyond.

What makes this theoretically possible is that light does not necessarily travel in a straight line. It travels along whatever path is fastest. To make something invisible, then, you need to devise a

situation where the fastest route is the one that bends around an object and re-joins on the other side. No naturally occurring material affects light this way, but scientists are starting to develop “metamaterials” that can do so. So far, they have designed such a material for microwaves, which are larger than light waves and easier to manipulate. That worked, in a modest way—it concealed an object from microwaves of a single wavelength—and, in principle, what works for one wave can work for them all. If you can cloak something from microwaves, you can cloak it from light waves; as Ball notes, you can even cloak it from seismic waves, so that an earthquake would pass around it and leave it unscathed. But “in principle” is a serious caveat. In reality, metamaterials present so many challenges—of optics, physics, engineering—that they are unlikely ever to produce true invisibility.

This would not have surprised the late science-fiction writer Douglas Adams. “The technology involved in making anything invisible is so infinitely complex,” Adams wrote in “Life, the Universe and Everything,” “that nine hundred and ninety-nine billion, nine hundred and ninety-nine million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a trillion it is much simpler and more effective just to take the thing away and do without it.” By contrast, he noted, there’s nothing easier than getting a human mind to ignore something it doesn’t want to see. Thus was born the example par excellence of psychological invisibility: the Somebody Else’s Problem field, which, by means unspecified, amplifies our natural desire not to deal.

Adams was not the only writer to exploit psychological invisibility. It’s as popular in fiction as capes and cloaks and rings. The Shadow, who debuted in the nineteen-thirties as a pulp-fiction crime fighter, cannot technically turn invisible, but he can “cloud men’s minds” so that they do not see him. The time machine in “Dr. Who” generates a “perception filter” to keep passersby from noticing it. (The show’s creators had a little fun with varieties of invisibility. The perception filter, they tell us, was originally intended as just an extra layer of security, since the time machine also has a “chameleon circuit” to make it match its background.

Alas, that circuit broke, leaving the machine stuck, famously, in the shape of a nineteen-sixties-era London police box.)

People, too, come with perception filters. Modern cognitive science has divvied these up and named them—inattentive blindness (think invisible gorillas), change blindness, confirmation bias, and so forth—but magicians and tricksters have known about them for centuries. The power of turning invisible, the nineteenth-century occultist Eliphas Levi wrote, was, above all, “that of turning or paralyzing the attention, so that light arrives at the visual organ without exciting the regard of the soul.” His example sounds like a scene from a Marx Brothers movie. “Let a man,” he wrote, “who is being pursued by his intending murderers, dart into a side street, return immediately, and advance with perfect calmness toward his pursuers, or let him mix with them and seem intent on the case, and he will certainly make himself invisible.”

If you are being pursued by murderers—or trying to evade an army, pick a pocket, or hide a time machine—it is obvious why you would want to turn invisible. What is less evident is why any of the rest of us would care to do so. Unlike other superpowers, invisibility is not intrinsically pleasurable. One might yearn to fly for the sake of flying, but invisibility is useless, or worse, unless it is a means to an end. Ball puts it concisely: “No one becomes invisible without a motive.” And, in the story of invisibility, as in so many stories, it is the motives that matter most.

Broadly speaking, there are two reasons for wanting to turn invisible: to get away from something or to get away with something. Of these two motives, the second, dodgier one is the more famous, thanks, in part, to a parable in Plato’s Republic. Plato has Glaucon tell the tale: a shepherd named Gyges stumbles upon a ring that can make him invisible, then promptly uses it to bed a queen, slay her king, and claim the throne for himself. Glaucon uses this story to make a point about justice—that we accept it because we must, not because we aspire to be vir-

tuous. That is also a point about human nature: “Everyone will do evil if he can.” For Glaucon, the trouble with invisibility is that it is tantamount to impunity; it liberates a corrupt species from the obligation to behave.

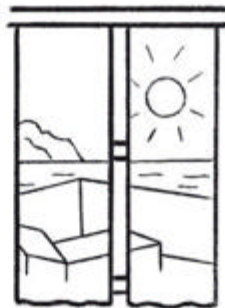
It is difficult to recover from an attack on your character that appears in the cornerstone text of Western philosophy. Two millennia later, invisibility still suffered a reputation as a particularly insidious form of absolute power: morally toxic to whoever possessed it, physically hazardous to everyone else. In H. G. Wells’s 1897 classic, “The Invisible Man,” the title character dedicates his life to discovering the secret of invisibility—only to be driven mad by it and use it to launch a “Reign of Terror” against humanity.

Very few people, presumably, would turn genocidal from turning invisible. But the license to do as we shouldn’t is not just a potential negative side effect of invisibility; it is part of the allure. Ask a typical thirteen-year-old boy why he wants to become invisible and, sooner or later, he will probably mention the girls’ locker room. The average adult doesn’t aim much higher. In a 2001 episode of “This American Life,” the comedian and writer John Hodgman presented grownups with that perennial playground hypothetical: would you rather be invisible or fly? Those who chose invisibility cited as their goals sneaking onto airplanes, stealing cashmere sweaters, spying on exes, and

watching women take showers. (The desire to be unseen is so often a desire to see what you shouldn’t that it sometimes seems to merge with its superpower cousin, X-ray vision. That one isn’t the most morally inspiring of the bunch, either.)

These are just thought experiments, of course; for

obvious reasons, we don’t have much empirical evidence about how invisible people actually behave. Recently, though, that has begun to change. As Ball points out, anyone with an Internet connection can turn invisible, and the results seldom boost one’s faith in humanity. The Internet is crawling with trolls, behaving under their virtual cloaks of invisibility in ways most of them would not if they



could be identified. Their behavior supports Glaucon's sour assessment of our longing to turn invisible: that it is really a longing to be unaccountable—to be, like gods and despots, beyond the reach of custom, obligation, and law.

Ball largely endorses this view; his focus, per his subtitle, is invisibility's "dangerous allure." But if invisibility stands in for absolute power it is also the opposite: our governing metaphor for powerlessness. When we talk about, say, "lesbian invisibility," we are talking about disenfranchisement—an involuntary absence from the political and cultural life of a society. That use of invisibility grew popular in the nineteen-seventies and eighties with the rise of identity politics, which sought to define and champion marginalized identities and render them visible to the mainstream. Today, it has become pervasive. We talk about the invisibility of homeless people, of the chronically ill, of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan. In these contexts, invisibility is impotence. What is powerful is to be seen.

Ball briefly addresses this notion of invisibility as powerlessness, via Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man"—but, as he acknowledges, that is an imperfect example. The invisibility experienced by Ellison's nameless narrator is not simply a matter of being overlooked by society. It is, paradoxically, a consequence of conspicuousness; he is invisible because no one, black or white, can see beyond everything they project onto the color of his skin. Ball sums this up as "the price of nonconformity" and moves on, leaving unasked a broader question: how can invisibility function so well as both a fantasy of empowerment and a nightmare of powerlessness?

One answer is this: with invisibility, as with so many forces, what matters is who gets to wield it. If you choose to be invisible, it's a superpower; if it's forced upon you, it's a plight. The same goes for being visible. We typically speak of visibility as an asset—but the subjugated are not always overlooked, and they do not always want to be seen. The poet Claudia Rankine addressed this issue last year in "Citizen," her award-winning prose-poetry investigation into the operations of racism in the United States. "For so long, you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a per-

son," she wrote. But eventually, she continued, "you begin to understand yourself as rendered hyper-visible." The starkest example today may be African-American men, who are hyper-visible to law enforcement. But they are not alone. As Foucault or any bullied school kid could tell you, the powerful often wield scrutiny as a weapon, punishing the powerless for any deviation from an exacting code of speech, dress, behavior, and physical appearance. For those thus rendered visible against their will, the dream of invisibility is not about attaining power but escaping it. Camouflage is, after all, an adaptation not only of predators but also of prey.

But, again, we humans have no natural camouflage—not even in our fantasies. Unlike most superpowers (flight, telekinesis, the ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound), invisibility seldom inheres in the body, and it is almost never a permanent condition. It is a temporary state, bestowed from outside, through spells or talismans or clothing. So, too, in life: none of us are wholly in charge of how visible we are, and none of us want to be visible to everyone all the time. Nor do we want to be permanently and universally invisible, the condition of the lost and the dead. What we want, and what the fantasy of invisibility promises, is the power to control the transition. We yearn to turn invisible when we are humiliated or persecuted or following our darker angels. But when we are our best selves, experiencing our finest moments; or when we are lonely and careworn and suffering—at such times, what we want is to be seen.

When Ball recounts the story of Gyges, he omits an important bit of context. In telling the tale, Glaucon is serving, as he does throughout the *Republic*, as an interlocutor to Socrates—and Socrates does not agree with him. People often act on their worst impulses, the philosopher acknowledges. But in those cases we are ashamed, he says, because we do admire justice for its own sake, and we do strive to be moral, "even if a man should put on a Gyges' ring."

We shouldn't be surprised that Socrates rejects Glaucon's argument against invisibility, because we know what he thinks of invisibility over all. The alle-

gory of the cave is an argument that the visible world is deceptive. Like the prisoners in that cave mistaking a shadow play on its walls for reality, we take the things we see as true, when in fact they are degraded versions of abstract, invisible ideals—what we now call Platonic forms. It is on these grounds that Plato banishes artists from his republic: because, rather than help us apprehend those ideals, they peddle more distortions and untruths. For Plato, it is the visible that is corrupt and corrupting, while the invisible is essential and pure.

I like having artists in my republic, but on the broader subject of invisibility Plato has a point. Almost everything around us is imperceptible, almost all the rest is maddeningly difficult to perceive, and what remains scarcely amounts to anything. Physicists estimate that less than five per cent of the known universe is visible—where "visible" means only that we could, theoretically, observe it, given the right instruments and sufficient physical proximity. A far smaller amount of the known universe, roughly 0.3 per cent, is dense enough to form stars. Perhaps 0.000001 per cent exists in earthlike planets. As for the part that exists in or near our own planet, the stuff that is visible to us in any literal sense: that is a decimal attenuating out almost to nothing, a speck of dust in the cosmic hinterlands.

Even here on earth, with our senses seemingly full to the brim, we see almost nothing of what matters. Molecules, microbes, cells, germs, genes, viruses, the interior of the planet, the depths of the ocean: none of that is visible to the naked eye. And, as David Hume noted, none of the causes controlling our world are visible under any conditions; we can see a fragment of the what of things, but nothing at all of the why. Gravity, electricity, magnetism, economic forces, the processes that sustain life as well as those that eventually end it—all this is invisible. We cannot even see the most important parts of our own selves: our thoughts, feelings, personalities, psyches, morals, minds, souls.

For the past five hundred years, the great project of science has been to dispel as much as possible of this invisibility. In our determination to access unseen worlds, we have invented microscopes and telescopes, thermometers and radiometers and sonar and seismographs,

X-rays and injectable dyes and CAT scans and magnetic resonance imaging. Together with countless other advances, these have helped render visible the otherwise hidden elements of our bodies, our planet, and our universe.

And yet we have kept up the ancient dream of turning ourselves invisible. Or, more precisely, we have kept up the dream of turning fully invisible, for we have always been halfway there. Our physical bodies already share the stage with our strange, unlocatable minds, and our culture is unequivocal about which part it values more. Every major religion holds that our mortal body matters less than our immortal soul, and we teach our children that it is what we are like on the inside—the unseen side—that counts. No wonder we sometimes long to make our invisibility complete. In that fantasy, we become both more like our true self and more like the stuff of the universe: an essence, a mystery, a cause, a force. But we should not be so quick to wish away our perceptible existence. In a universe that is vast and mostly matterless, in which the invisible exceeds the visible by a staggering margin, the extraordinary fact about us is that we number among the things that can be seen.

And more remarkable still: from our own tiny bulwark against the invisible, we have looked into what we cannot look at—inferred its existence, and, to a stunning extent, figured out how it works. It's hard to know which is more astonishing: that the visible sliver of the universe should betray the unseen structure of the entirety, or that the human mind, by studying that sliver, could begin to reconstruct all the rest.

We can do this because the invisible, although it keeps itself hidden, makes itself felt. I cannot see the people I love as I write this, but I can sense their pull, and I act as I do because of their existence. Taken literally, that is how the cosmos works. An invisible mass alters the orbit of a comet; dark energy affects the acceleration of a supernova; the earth's magnetic field tugs on birds, butterflies, sea turtles, and the compasses of mariners. The whole realm of the visible is compelled by the invisible. Our planet, our solar system, our galaxy, our universe: all of it, all of us, are pushed, pulled, spun, shifted, set in motion, and held together by what we cannot see. ♦

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ON TELEVISION

MY IDEA OF FUN

"Better Call Saul" and the age of TV triage.

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



When the deal was announced for a spinoff of AMC's "Breaking Bad," based on one of the show's minor comic characters, the legal shyster Saul Goodman (Bob Odenkirk), even superfans weren't sure what to think. At the time, Vince Gilligan's drama about a science teacher turned meth king was in its final season, whipping out brilliant episodes like fastballs. Media coverage, mine included, was caught up in worshipful celebrations. Though the last episode ended up being something of an anticlimax, a sleek set of showdowns between a clever badass and his cartoon foes, that still left sixty-one other rowdy, rich installments, forming the morally intricate

backstory of an archetypal villain, Walter White. Why spin off, then? Just to keep things spinning?

"Better Call Saul," on the verge of its own finale, of Season 1, has a lot to recommend it, particularly for devotees of the original show. Odenkirk, with his wry croak of a voice and his surfer-gone-to-seed looks, remains a likable figure, even when he's doing wrong. We get backstories for "Breaking Bad" regulars, including the gangster Tuco Salamanca (Raymond Cruz) and the grizzled ex-cop enforcer Mike Ehrmantraut, played by Jonathan Banks. Like its predecessor, "Better Call Saul" has a mordant wit: it's full of quotable put-downs and promis-

ing themes about the fuzzy line between legal and illegal skills. It has received plenty of praise for its cinematography, which has the deliberate framing of a graphic novel illustrated by Edward Hopper, all yellow-green suburban boxes and claustrophobic boardrooms, along with eccentric locations, such as a law office tucked away inside a nail salon, and surreal flashes, like a tarantula crawling over a necktie. And yet, nine episodes in, "Better Call Saul" never really answers the question: Would you watch this show if you didn't miss "Breaking Bad"?

A show doesn't need to be perfect to have a powerful allure for viewers who just want to hang out in the world it invokes. (I've watched every episode of "Nashville.") But TV is triage these days. While it used to be possible to catch up with every ambitious drama—during that golden era of TV efficiency, when there were only five of them—that's no longer true. At this year's Television Critics Association meetings, FX's C.E.O., John Landgraf, a prolific producer himself, presented a report that was highly alarming, at least to television critics. Last year, according to FX's data, three hundred and fifty-two scripted first-run primetime and late-night programs aired on broadcast, cable, and streaming networks in the U.S., not including PBS. Joe Adalian, crunching the stats at *New York's Vulture*, wrote that the number of new prime-time scripted cable shows had "doubled in just the past five years, tripled since 2007 (the year *Mad Men* premiered), and grown a staggering 683 percent since the turn of the century." When people angrily tweet at me that some show is the best thing on TV, I know they're lying: they haven't watched most of the other ones, and neither have I.

Under these conditions, the question of where to invest one's attention becomes more complicated, and, so far, "Better Call Saul" doesn't offer a clear answer, though it shudders with potential energy. At the show's center is a character portrait, the story of James (Jimmy) McGill (Odenkirk), a seedy attorney scrambling for gigs among Albuquerque's less affluent clientele. As a young man, Jimmy was a small-time grifter, scamming drunks in alleys, and a disappointment to his older brother, the high-powered lawyer Chuck (Michael McKean). Now he's trying to use his

Like "Breaking Bad," its successor is about the metamorphosis of a sad sack.

bullshitting skills for good rather than for evil. (Or, if not for good, then for chaotic neutral.) Like “Breaking Bad,” this is a show about the metamorphosis of a sad sack: but, whereas Walt was an arrogant egghead, Jimmy is humble. He’s sweet to his onetime girlfriend, Kim (Rhea Seehorn); he’s tender with Chuck, who is sidelined because of a supposed allergy to electricity. We know where Jimmy ends up, however: someday, he’ll become Saul Goodman (“S’all good, man!”), that slick guy who helps you out when you want to kill someone, hide your meth earnings, or hunt down a ricin cigarette. Jimmy’s a decent-ish guy, but he’s fated to become a far worse man’s comic relief, “the kind of lawyer guilty people hire,” as one potential client calls him, in a description that stings.

There’s the seed of a funny, mean idea inside that portrait: that being a lawyer and being a grifter are not, in truth, different jobs. The future Saul Goodman is a gifted legal advocate, but only in the sense that “The Music Man”’s Harold Hill was a brilliant music teacher and Don Draper the world’s greatest lover. He’s not sleazy; he’s just drawn that way. In one of the show’s best early episodes, he tries to pull off a double con with two idiotic scammers, red-headed skateboarders who fake accidents in order to defraud drivers. Jimmy’s scheme isn’t all that promising—he’s trying to “rescue” a wealthy criminal so that she’ll be grateful and hire him—but even that half-assed plan goes worse than expected. Eventually, Jimmy ends up in the desert, facing off with Tuco and his thugs, in a scene that can’t help reminding viewers of “Breaking Bad.” (There’s a side-ways shot that’s an homage to one of that show’s best episodes, “Ozymandias.”) What begins as a scary showdown becomes a hilariously rude negotiation, as Jimmy talks a death sentence down in increments, getting Tuco to weigh options that range from a “Colombian necktie” to a black eye. “They disrespected my *abuelita*,” Tuco argues. “They called her ‘biznatch.’” Jabbering away, Jimmy gets Tuco to consider cutting off the skateboarders’ legs, then simply breaking them—and, finally, breaking just one leg. “I’m the best lawyer ever!” he announces afterward, at the hospital.

It’s a pungent, anarchic sequence, but

after that episode the show seemed to lose focus, hopping from case to case, from style to style. One week, it’s a thriller; another, it’s a quirky procedural, full of thickly drawn portraits of loser clients; then it’s a solemn noir about Mike Ehrmantraut’s past. Ideas are invoked but not fully developed: Jimmy pulls off a phony-baloney P.R. stunt; he gets into elder law and plans to sue an old-age home. During more inconsistent episodes, I found myself craving the return of “Better Call Saul”’s stand-out character, the normcore grifter Betsy Kettleman, a suburban mom who stashes her cash in the bathroom of her McMansion. As played by Julie Ann Emery, with a fabulous air of unearned outrage, Betsy feels as dangerous as any thug: there’s weird comedy in her intractable insistence—even to the lawyer who saw her bag of cash—that she’s innocent. With her pursed lips and her bland bob, the character has echoes of “Breaking Bad”’s uptight Lydia, and of the whole nagging-wife dynamic that haunted Skyler White. But Emery’s oddball intensity makes Betsy feel like an original, less grounded in nostalgia than the show around her is, but well matched to its noir satisfactions.

Taste has its own algorithms. Do you enjoy neon signs, closeups of coffee cups, and men smiling with angry eyes? (I do.) Do you think an extended gag about a toilet-training potty that says “Gosh, you’re big” is hilarious? (I did not.) Do you fantasize about being as confident in your macho wisdom as Mike? (Maybe?) Finally, toward the end of the season, the show’s aims sharpen. It is revealed that Jimmy’s brother Chuck is working against him, and, as they fight, Chuck screams, about being a lawyer, “You don’t slide into it like a cheap pair of slippers and then reap the rewards.” Jimmy’s all surface, Chuck argues; and it’s true that, in some sense, our hero’s been playing dress-up all season long. In one episode, he mimics the threads of a corporate lawyer he loathes; in another, he dons a white Matlock suit. Before trials, he psychs himself up by yelling “Showtime!” in a nod to “All That Jazz.” Once “Better Call Saul” puts on the black hat, at last, it may ultimately be a show about how manhood operates as a form of theatre—and how fun it is when you finally nail the role. ♦

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FEELINGS

"Ex Machina" and "About Elly."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Alicia Vikander plays a robot named Ava in a movie directed by Alex Garland.

There are three main characters in “Ex Machina,” and one of them is Ava (Alicia Vikander). She is not just a pretty face. The rest of her head, too, is very pretty: a dome of fine metallic mesh, atop a delicate stalk of clear neck, through which we see the glow of blue diodes and the play of mechanical muscles. The pattern continues below. Parts of her, like the bust, are politely encased, while others, like the legs and the stomach, are transparent, with luminous coils and loops where her guts should be. When Ava walks or turns, she gives off sounds—tiny whirrs and hisses, as of rods and pistons sighing into place. If necessary, her frame can be robbed in strips of flesh, to fashion a complete young woman. In all, she seems absorbingly real, enough to overshadow the non-robotic people she meets. That is both the coup and the pitfall of “Ex Machina”: the humanoid is more human than the humans.

Ava’s creator is Nathan (Oscar Isaac), a loner of bottomless wealth. At the age of thirteen, he wrote the code for Bluebook—the world’s most popular Internet search engine.” Now he is a guru

with all the fixings: cropped hair, a thicket of black beard, a burning stare. He resides, with Ava, in a research facility, among meadows and mountains, attended by a silent servant named Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno). One day, a helicopter brings Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), “the most talented coder in my company,” according to Nathan. Beware of movies that jack themselves up with superlatives, as if straining not merely to catch but to merit our earnest attention; in “Ex Machina,” the strain increases as Caleb declares, “I’m hot on high-level abstractions,” and as Nathan beguiles him in return. “You’re good with words, you’re quotable,” he says. Sorry, guys, that’s for us to decide.

Caleb’s task is to put Ava through the hoops: to determine, in a series of interviews, whether she can truly think, and even feel, for herself. If so, she will represent—you guessed it—“the greatest scientific event in the history of man,” as Nathan modestly claims. There are seven conversations (titled “Ava: Session 1,” and so forth), and they are the endoskeleton to which the story clings.

To begin with, they have the lurch of an unsuccessful speed date. “You like Mozart?” Ava inquires. “I like Depeche Mode,” Caleb replies. During the second session, however, there’s a power cut, and, under blood-red emergency lighting, and with Nathan unable to listen in, she murmurs to Caleb, “You shouldn’t trust anything he says.” The plot is in motion, although who is pulling the strings—Pinocchio or Geppetto, so to speak—becomes ever harder to decide. Ava has no doubt that she exists, but she fears that such existence can be terminated. “What will happen to me if I fail your test?” she asks Caleb. “Do you think I might be switched off?”

That faint tapping you can hear is scholars already drafting their lectures on the mind-body problem in “Ex Machina,” adding it to the roster of films, from “Metropolis” to last month’s “Chappie,” that make philosophers go soft in the hard drive. But a movie can tackle a host of interesting themes and still be a bad movie, as anyone who saw a befuddled Johnny Depp grope his way through “Transcendence” can attest, and there are times when the gears of “Ex Machina,” which was written and directed by Alex Garland, begin to grind. The third session is particularly glum, proving that the spirit of screwball has yet to descend upon robotics. “How do I look?” Ava says. “You look,” Caleb begins, and there follows a long hunt for the mot juste: “Good.”

And yet “Ex Machina,” despite the stutters, slowly finds its grip and starts to squeeze. Garland, whose scripts have often prowled the zones of science fiction (he wrote “28 Days Later,” “Sunshine,” and “Never Let Me Go”), is making his debut as a director, and his method feels patient to a fault. There is little excitement, even at the climax, but the creepiness of the setup generates its own hum of suspense, and you hunger for more details of exactly what Nathan has devised. “I had to get away from circuitry,” he tells Caleb, showing him a manufactured brain—a beautiful clump of gel, the size of a conch, its innards writhing with synaptic sparks. Oscar Isaac is someone filmmakers turn to for a cautious intensity, and here he dials it up, leaving us nicely uncertain whether Nathan is a dauntless pioneer or a dangerous loon. Hanging over him—and

also over Kyoko and Caleb, who at one point slices his own arm as if to cry, “Do I not bleed?”—is a suspicion, inherited from “Blade Runner,” that anyone can be a replicant, perhaps unwittingly so. Hence the great sequence in which Nathan and Kyoko start to boogie, their rhythms so seamlessly attuned that you wonder if dance can be downloaded, like an app. If perfection is inhuman, though, what should we make of Fred Astaire?

In the end, “Ex Machina” lives and dies by Alicia Vikander. The film clicks on when she first appears, and it dims every time she goes away. She will be much in evidence this year, with six movies set for release, but Ava may be hard to beat. Her initial “Hello” to Caleb, with half a question mark hovering after it, echoes the “Hello” with which another Ava marked her ominous entrance. Viewers of “The Killers,” in 1946, saw Ava Gardner swivel on a piano stool, greet Burt Lancaster, size up the poor lunk, and let him know with a single smile, to his infinite delight, that he was doomed. You would think that the new Ava, being man-made, would be less of a femme fatale, but she can still unmake a man with her imitation of a femme—putting on clothes, shoes, stockings, and a wig, then removing them, in semi-silhouette, when she is sure that Caleb is watching.

That is pure calculation, of course, easily arranged by a programmer as dexterous as Nathan, yet Vikander, brimful of an eagerness not so much to engage with the world as to toy with it, *does* suggest that Ava has slipped the bonds of her inventor. Such is the dream of movies like “Ex Machina,” “I, Robot,” and

“A.I.”: an intelligence that sloughs off its own artifice. The components of Spielberg’s movie didn’t quite slot together, but the leading androids—Haley Joel Osment, as the kid, and Jude Law, as the smooth-skinned gigolo—were touching in their aspirations, and Vikander somehow twines them both, the innocent and the decadent, into the figure of Ava. We are reminded (and this is why such films, strong and weak alike, keep coming along) that the goal of robots is not merely to serve us without causing harm, as Isaac Asimov proposed, but to play a part. They are Method humans, reaching deep into their software to beget a replica of truth. Ava doesn’t just need to get out of Nathan’s house, and fast. She needs an agent.

Happiness, in the first half hour of “About Elly,” is passed around like the flu. A bunch of college friends get together for a weekend away, most of them with spouses and small children. The friends are no longer young, yet their spirits seem buoyantly high, and the movie is keen to join in—glancing at face after face, and eavesdropping on the overlapping chat. Characters dance without warning, answer a question with a line of song, and play charades. They have to shift from one rental villa to another, but the move doesn’t faze them, even though the new place has broken windows and no beds. Besides, it’s right on the beach. You can hear the crash of the surf.

At what point we realize that disaster awaits, and that these contented lives, like all lives, can be caught in a riptide, is hard to specify. Suffice to say that

something happens, and that husbands, wives, and old pals who felt inseparable descend into a roiling recrimination. It’s difficult and upsetting to behold, but we shouldn’t be surprised; the director is Asghar Farhadi, who mapped out the pangs of divorce in “A Separation” (2011). “About Elly” was made two years before that, but only now is it being released, and, perhaps because the action is confined to Farhadi’s native Iran, it’s a better movie than “The Past” (2013), which was set, more tentatively, in Paris. Here, by the treacherous sea, Farhadi is at home, and, as is his custom, it is women who emerge from the crowd of characters and come, heavy-laden, to the fore.

One of them is Elly (Taraneh Ali-dooosti), the only single woman in the group, described as “warm and calm.” She is also inscrutable, and, when she recedes from the action, whereabouts unknown, the mystery darkens. She was invited by Sepideh (Golshifteh Farahani), who, despite barely knowing her, was hoping to marry her off to one of the guys. As the plot proceeds, we get an unnerving sense that the whole film, whose early stages bore such a modern and liberated ease, is gradually re-rooting itself in old, tenacious beliefs—in a world where honor and shame run deeper than the mere matter of whether a person is alive or dead. “About Elly” both clutches us tight and shuts us out, adding wave upon wave of secrets and lies. Charades were just the beginning. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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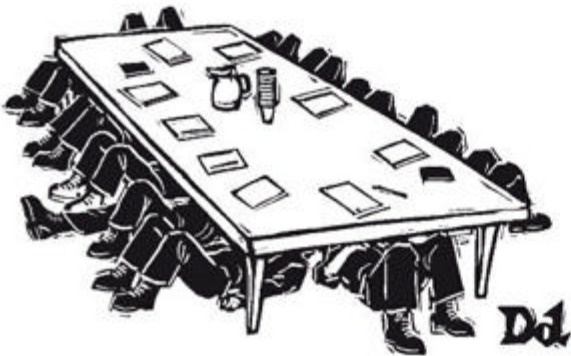
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, April 12th. The finalists in the March 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 27th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Welcome to Mechanics Anonymous."
Daniel Bateman, New York City



THE FINALISTS

"Yeah, I used to be a heart surgeon on my planet."
Simon Marcus, New York City

"Would you mind turning on the air, please?"
Allison Alcasabas, New York City

"This way we avoid the turnpike."
Louise Schiller, Oakland, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST





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